

Judas – Stage Whispers Review



World Premiere. Adelaide Fringe. STARC Productions in association with Smokescreen. Mainstage at Bakehouse. March 5-16, 2019

It is no coincidence that this production of *Judas* is supporting Amnesty International Australia. The play's message is as old as the biblical times that inspired it; that of individuals whose rights and very being are destroyed in times of war and political unrest. Holding up a mirror to our world and times, we see the biblical parable, the story of Christ, paralleled with our modern world and times.

Judas, originally titled *The Twelfth Disciple*, is a cleverly written story of political intrigue. It could be set anywhere as the three actors in this production have accents that indicate they originate from three different countries. The initial hint that this tale is set somewhere in the Middle East

is a man called Youssef, played by Tim Marriott. He gives a bold and courageous lecture to students urging them to remember their place in the universe and reminding them that it is they, not God, who are being tested. He proclaims that he grieves for the dead, and also the living, in times where atrocities are committed in God's name. Chillingly, he is unaware of the presence of a powerful woman, played by Stefani Rossi who is to become his accuser and co-tormentor.

Youssef is a married man, a father and a disciple of the Prophet. He is 'everyman', an ordinary individual with whom the audience is able to identify easily and who is placed in an extraordinary and terrifying circumstance. The audience is drawn in, admiring his conviction, but the fear for his wife and child, who have also been taken into custody, is palpable.

Marc Clement plays the interrogator as dispassionate, cruel, disinterested, and disengaged from emotion or decency. He uses strong physical stance and unflinching eye contact to harangue, browbeat and torture. His viciousness is often delivered out front, to the audience, with powerful effect.

To begin with Tim Marriott plays Youssef with fire, passion and conviction, but as the story unfolds, we share in his terror for his family and see him gradually, surely, being forced to relent and give up his leader, his brother, the Prophet. Marriott's range of emotions is compelling, from powerful, defiant tirades to a bowed, broken man who gives up his brother in exchange for his family. Who is behind this travesty?

Stefani Rossi, as the lead interrogator, portrays a ruthless woman who will stop at nothing. She plants her words with riveting eye contact to both Youssef and the audience, rather like a spider playing with a fly trapped in a web.

The political message is strong. It is a single faith state, but none in particular; in fact, with clever technical support and a large screen, we see film that shows us that this could be anywhere, anyone, any faith, everyone's problem.

Biblical references are woven liberally throughout the script and by the end there is no doubt whose story it parallels and what the message is.

This is a co-production between Smokescreen and STARC Productions. Co-directed by Tim Marriott and Tony Knight, we see two courageous companies create a compelling hour of gruelling theatre, and at a time when we ignore their message at our own peril.

Jude Hines

* Note Tony Knight is a Stage Whispers reviewer