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## The Last Days of Judas Iscariot

(Lutheran Church of the Master; 99 seats; \$20 top) A Black Dahlia Theater presentation of a play in two acts by Stephen Adly Giurgis. Directed by Matt Shakman.

Satan - David Clennon  
Jesus - Joshua Wolf Coleman  
Henrietta Iscariot/Sister Glenna - Suzanne Ford  
Simon the Zealot/Saint Peter/Bailiff/Soldier - Marco Greco  
Saint Monica - Chane't Johnson  
The Judge/Caiaphas - Robert Machray  
Uncle Pinot/Soldier/ASM - Gaalan Michaelson  
Butch Honeywell/Matthias of Galilee - Rob Nagle  
El-Fayoumy - Jay Harik  
Gloria - Victoria Platt  
Cunningham - Susan Pourfar  
Mary Magdalene/Mother Theresa/Loretta - Deborah Puette  
Judas - Daniel Jay Shore  
Pontius Pilate - Terrell Tilford  
Saint Matthew/Saint Thomas/Freud/Soldier - Rick D. Wasserman

By [TERRY MORGAN](#)

Most plays dealing seriously with religious material tend to tread cautiously, and end up either so timid that that affect nobody, or so pious that they cease being theater and instead serve as propaganda. Playwright Stephen Adly Giurgis, however, does not tread cautiously. This is not due to cockiness, but represents a desire for honesty, which is something his remarkable play "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot" admirably demonstrates. The writing is both witty and deeply felt, a legal drama that becomes a searching examination of Christian tenets. The Black Dahlia Theater's west coast premiere production, staged at the Lutheran Church of the Master in Westwood, is entertaining, thought-provoking, and ultimately inspirational.

The setting is a courtroom in Purgatory, and the guilt or innocence of Judas (Daniel Jay Shore) is on the docket. Egyptian lawyer El-Fayoumy (Jay Harik), up from Hell for the job, represents the prosecution, and the tenacious Cunningham

(Susan Pourfar) stands for the defense in a case the court doesn't particularly want to hear. Various people are called to testify, from notables such as Mother Theresa (Deborah Puette) and Sigmund Freud (Rick D. Wasserman), direct witnesses including Saint Peter (Marco Greco) and Pontius Pilate (Terrell Tilford), to Satan (David Clennon), who is conjured up to confess to any influence he might have had. Meanwhile Judas sits catatonic in a room in the ninth circle of Hell, uncommunicative since his death, attended only by Jesus (Joshua Wolf Coleman).

Shore makes for a sympathetic Judas, presenting a miserable intensity underlaid with a core of strength in the role. It's difficult to not play Jesus as a stereotypical icon, but Coleman manages to demonstrate human dimension and frustrated compassion in the part. Shore and Coleman's scene together, the heart of the play, feels like the playwright authentically struggling with his own beliefs, and the result, as performed by these two fine actors, is simultaneously angry, fragile, and quite moving. Clennon, resplendent in a fur-lined jacket, crimson silk shirt and leather pants, steals the show as Satan. He's genially amusing as the seemingly casual Prince of Lies, who nonetheless, in a fit of pique, demolishes both lawyers by revealing all the dark secrets of their lives.

Harik is delightfully energetic as the flattering El-Fayoumy, and Pourfar is solid as Cunningham, a lawyer who is not out of her depth at all. Greco delivers a brash New York take on Simon the Zealot and Saint Peter, and Wasserman is excellent as the self-satisfied Freud. Robert Machray's Caiaphas, arrogantly motioning the prosecuting attorney to object, benefits mightily from the actor's superb voice, and Tilford's Pilate is one cool customer, turning the tables on Cunningham with righteous anger. Chane't Johnson is a bright spot as the brassy but compassionate Saint Monica, and Puette is humorously immovable as Mother Theresa. Finally, Rob Nagle's closing monologue as Butch Honeywell, a simply affecting declaration of loss, is a subtle and powerful piece of acting.

Director Matt Shakman gets the best from his cast, and uses the church as a setting very well, staging scenes everywhere from the front and center of the room to the organist's balcony. E.B. Brooks' costumes add flair to the show, and Mike Durst's lighting--a challenge in this traditionally nontheatrical space -- is professional and evocative. Those who are easily offended should know that there is a good deal of profanity in this show. Although it is at first a bit disconcerting to hear "motherfucker" inside a church, this production mixes the sacred and the profane with estimable grace.

Sets, Denny Dugally; costumes, E. B. Brooks; lighting, Mike Durst; sound, Joel Spence; production stage manager, Tabatha Roy. Opened, reviewed July 28, 2007; runs through Aug. 26. Running time: 3 HOURS.

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