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Transformations of Jesus Christ Superstar

Master's Diploma Thesis

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2015

I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author's signature

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor Mgr. Tomáš Kačer Ph.D. for his help, guidance, and advice. I am also indebted to my friend Fjodor Vinokurov for his valuable observations.

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Introduction

When Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice started working on *Jesus Christ Superstar* in the late 1960s, hardly anyone in the world of musical theatre knew their names. Both being in their early twenties and with no established artistic reputation to lose, they felt no limitations that might keep them from experimenting and advancing their innovating ideas.

The topic the young men had chosen was obviously very delicate and likely to cause controversy. After all, reinterpreting the Bible has always been a risky business. What they eventually offered to the world was a brave combination of expressive modern music and the story of the last seven days in the life of Jesus told in a very untraditional way - from Judas' point of view. The rock opera was not written with the intention to offend anyone. However, in the back of the mind of every person, including deeply religious individuals, this approach to the biblical story had the power of raising questions that might have never been asked before.

By many, this new perspective was perceived as an unforgivable blasphemy upon the sacred story. The unique aspect of *Jesus Christ Superstar* lies in the fact that it emphasizes the humanity of Christ over his divinity. Jesus is depicted as a vulnerable human being, questioning the rightness of his own actions and fearing his own death. Not treated as a religious icon by the authors, he comes across as a highly moral and sensitive man who found himself in a position of a celebrity ("superstar"). Towards the end of the story, Jesus becomes unable to deal with his fame and, eventually, alienates himself from the people around him.

Judas, on the other hand, has lost some of his wickedness that dominates his personality in the Bible. As a narrator of the story, he shares his worries about his friend's current status and about the future of the whole community.

Finally, the portrayal of Mary Magdalene also differs from the original image. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, it is implied that she loves Jesus not as a God, but in a very human way.

This interpretation of the biblical story could not get by without protests by religious groups. On the other hand, it also gained admiration of many people, especially among young generation, who found the provocative approach of the rock opera strangely attractive and easy to relate to.

After the release of Norman Jewison's movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1973, the rock opera was conserved by many people as a direct response to the hippie culture and to the political events of the early 1970s. However, Webber's music and Rice's striking libretto turned out to be well-adaptable to new impulses given by the changing nature of human society.

Throughout more than four decades, the world has seen countless reincarnations of *Jesus Christ Superstar* that became products of their own time, reacting to the situation of a particular time and place.

The aim of this diploma thesis is to examine this adaptability of the rock opera and to analyze the variety of means that can be chosen to deal with the story and make it appealing to a particular audience. It provides a deeper analysis of three productions: Norman Jewison's movie adaptation from 1973, Laurence Connor's *Jesus Christ Superstar – Arena Tour 2012* and the Czech version of the rock opera introduced to the Czech audience for the first time in 1994. Although produced in different eras with a different cultural background, each of these three reincarnations became a great success.

Norman Jewison introduced a "story inside of a story" concept with strong references to the modern world on one hand and authenticity of the story filmed on location on the other. Laurence Connor provided a production set entirely in the

present, i.e. in the 21st century, and incorporated current issues of today's world such as consumerism and the power of media. The Czech production was characterized by a traditional approach to the story with the focus placed on simplicity, authenticity and historical accuracy.

The libretto of *Jesus Christ Superstar* has undergone minimal changes since 1970 when it was created; however, its text still offers endless possibilities for interpretation. The characters and their costumes as well as the situation around them can be rethought, reworked, and made more suitable for the vision the producer has in mind.

Although the emotional triangle between Mary Magdalene, Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot plays a crucial role in the rock opera, this thesis does not include the comparison of the personal relationships as their interpretation remains more or less unaffected by the different production concepts. It concentrates on the connection that the selected versions of *Jesus Christ Superstar* had to the time and place where they were introduced.

1 Specifics of rock opera

1.1 What is rock opera?

Music has always served as a reflection of times, mirroring the social, economic and political issues around. Hardly anywhere is this more evident than in the case of rock music in the 1960s. The Vietnam War, the progressing Civil Rights movement, the sexual revolution, and an increased acceptance of drug use, all had a great impact on the musical language of the era. Both lyrics and the raw sound of the rock compositions became a powerful tool for young musicians to express their opinions on the cultural changes that took place during this time. By the end of the decade, rock music became a dominant form of popular music.

Rock has always been a genuinely versatile genre combining elements of various musical styles, e.g. blues, country, folk and soul. It kept redefining and reinventing itself, with new rock bands constantly emerging and branching out into new sonic territory.[1]

This diversity proved to be particularly useful for 'concept albums' that became popular towards the end of the 1960s. The idea of creating an album with a single theme became attractive to a number of rock musicians. The way the concept albums were produced and structured required a significant amount of creativity as it "allowed scope for narrative, for genre mixing, for instrumental development […] and for lyrical complexity that was not possible in shorter form. […] The recording creates a complete system within which the possibility of sustained narrative alters how an album is listened to. The music itself becomes more complex, even if only to connect up the

[1] http://rock.about.com/od/rockmusic101/a/RockHistory.htm

song-cycle" (Hegarty 65–69). From there it did not take long before the storytelling tendencies culminated and the first rock opera was written.[2]

The terms 'concept album' and 'rock opera' are often used interchangeably, and, by many people, they may be treated as synonyms. Indeed, what all musical works labeled 'rock operas' have in common is the fact that, prior to their introduction to stages or cinema screens, they were released as a concept album with songs constructed as a cycle. It is generally accepted that a rock opera is considerably more focused on a specific story whereas in the concept album, the songs are linked by one theme. Sometimes, it is argued that, similarly to a traditional opera, the story should be sung and acted out by more than one character (the lead singer of a rock band).[3] Nevertheless, following these rules strictly would mean narrowing down the number of rock operas to the bare minimum, with the substantial majority remaining in the category of the concept album.

The year 1969 saw the release of three musical works commonly defined as 'rock operas'. Although The Pretty Things' *S.F. Sorrow* is regarded as the first rock opera, the British band The Who received much greater recognition for their musical work *Tommy*. Pete Townshend's touching and mystical story of a deaf, dumb and blind pinball player received a warm response from both the critics and the rock public, staying on the American album chart for two and a half years (Atkins 23). By the cultural mainstream, *Tommy* was perceived as a work of art. "Ultimately it triumphed because it pushed rock and roll to the limit of what the form could do and still remained, in its pure essence, rock and roll" (Atkins 121). Since its release as a double album,

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[2] According to many sources, The Who's *Tommy* is considered to be the first rock opera, possibly, because of the popularity the album gained right after its release. In this thesis, however, The Pretty Things' *S.F. Sorrow* is acknowledged to be the first rock opera.

[3] For example, Michael Campbell and James Brody state: "Labeling *Tommy* a 'rock opera' immediately implied its highbrow status, even if the label was misleading. As Richard Barnes points out, "Strictly speaking, [*Tommy*] isn't a rock opera at all. It has no staging, scenery, acting or recitative." It doesn't have much of a plot, either, and what there is, is difficult to follow" (Campbell 261).

Tommy has been both adapted as a film[4] in 1975 and staged on Broadway (1993-1995). Later in 1969, The Kinks followed with their own rock opera *Arthur* written by Ray Davies.

The 1970s are sometimes referred to as the Golden Age of rock opera. The notoriously famous *Jesus Christ Superstar*, written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice in the late 1960s, was released as a concept album in 1970 and soon after made its way on stage both in New York and in London. This version of the last seven days in the life of Jesus has dominated theatres around the world for more than 40 years.

As previously mentioned, the boundaries between 'concept album' and 'rock opera' tend to be rather blurry. Throughout the 1970s a number of remarkable musical works with a single theme or story came out and were further developed into movies or spectacular performances on stage that bridged the gap between rock concerts and theatrical presentations. Though not self-proclaimed, these compositions are commonly talked about as rock operas.

In 1972, David Bowie's first hit album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* became a sensation. The record tells a story of a doomed alien who takes human form as a rock star. Eventually, he is killed by his own fans, eaten alive by the energy he has fed them with. Marc Almond described *Ziggy Star* very simply: "It was an album that had a beginning, an end and told a story. It was like a rock opera" (*David Bowie & the Story of Ziggy Stardust*). Whether we agree or not, it definitely put Bowie in a new creative spot. For the UK tour with the Spiders from Mars in 1972, he combined rock music with exotic costumes, theatrical lighting, choreography and mime.[5]

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[4] The movie featured famous names Tina Turner, Eric Clapton, Elton John and Jack Nicholson.
[5] In August 1972, at the London Rainbow Theatre, Bowie's choreographer Lindsay Kemp incorporated the elements of the traditional Japanese theatre 'kabuki' into the performance. "In the background his dance group, The Astronettes, mimed every song." (Hendrikse)

The following year, Lou Reed took a brave step by composing an album that addressed a very conflicting subject. *Berlin*, a tale of drug addiction, domestic violence and suicide, turned out to be too dark and serious for its time. Despite the complexity and depth of the story and the beautiful, simple, direct language Reed used, the critics were merciless in the attacks upon the record.[6] [7]

The 'storytelling' of the band Genesis culminated in the album called *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (1974), a rather impenetrable story about Rael, a Puerto Rican kid from Bronx, who struggles in search of his own identity.[8] *The Lamb* is the final record that Genesis produced with Peter Gabriel and it was mainly him who added the elements of rock opera both by writing the whole concept and by emphasizing the 'spectacle' in live performances. "The stories and characters of Genesis's songs increasingly took on mythic proportions; and Gabriel's performance in his role of lead singer became increasingly dramatic. He had begun to emphasize the use of costumes, masks, make-up and props to create on-stage characters" (Inglis 108). The shows would also present three screens with slides to accompany the storyline.

At the end of the 1970s, Pink Floyd cemented their popularity with the masterpiece *The Wall* (1979). Sharing fragments of his childhood,[9] Roger Waters created a partially autobiographical story that portrays "a fictional, emotionally crippled, depressed rock star, Pink, who is unable to cope with the pressures of life and therefore builds a wall around himself" (Elicker 304). Apart from a tour of live concerts

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[6] Dave Thompson writes: "*Berlin* was not simply dismissed. It was destroyed. 'There are certain records that are so patently offensive that one wished to take some kind of physical vengeance on the artists that perpetrate them,' announced *Rolling Stone*, and the critical establishment lined up to agree."

[7] After the wave of criticism, Reed refused to listen to the record for years and only decided to play Berlin live for the first time in 2006.

[8] Peter Gabriel called Rael a "split personality".

[9] E.g. Waters was a five month old baby when his father died as a soldier in the Second World War in 1944.

that supported the release of the double album, in 1982, Waters collaborated with director Alan Parker on a film version, with Bob Geldof as the main protagonist.

The list of works that can be defined as 'rock operas' goes on – from the 1970s, we can mention Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick* (1972), The Who's *Quadrophenia* (1973), The Kinks' *Soap Opera* (1975), Webber's and Rice's *Evita* (1976) and Frank Zappa's *Joe's Garden* (1979).

Towards the beginning of the 1980s, the rock opera rush started to fade; although the medium of concept album continued its popularity, only few of these works are also regularly characterized as 'rock operas'.[10]

The limited nature of this thesis does not allow the analysis of the above mentioned works on a deeper level. On the whole, however, it is obvious that the vast majority of them are so closely associated with the career of a particular musician that the live performances by other artists are rather unlikely to happen.

1.2 'Rock opera' or 'rock musical'?

A question repeatedly raised by the lovers of musical theatre remains: What are the features that distinguish a rock opera from the genre of rock musical? This pair of terms, similarly as in the case of the 'rock opera' and the 'concept album', seems to cause confusion, as one term is mistaken for the other on a regular basis.

Tim Rice's and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* can be considered as one of the brightest examples of this tendency. Although the piece was

[10] From the concept albums verging on rock opera, we can name Queenryche's *Operation: Mindcrime* (1988), The Coolies' *Doug* (1988), Marilyn Manson's concept albums from the 1990s - *Antichrist* Superstar (1996), *Mechanical Animals* (1998). Green Day's Grammy winning, politically charged album *American Idiot* (2004) has been the band's biggest critical success so far. In 2010, it became the first punk rock opera to be performed on Broadway where it has garnered two Tony awards. (Smith 32)

originally defined as a rock opera, it has fallen in the category of musical with the rest of Webber's works. Why is it so?

The author's reputation as the most successful composer of musicals of our time has definitely affected the way the audiences refer to his first famous work. His other compositions, e.g. *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cats* fit perfectly in the 'box' of the genre of musical. It is only natural to apply this definition on all his works. In a nutshell, any title by Webber is usually assumed to be a musical.

Moreover, before the New York production began in 1971, the authors were advised to start calling their show a 'musical' instead of a 'rock opera'. The reason for this decision was purely commercial: the producer was worried that the word 'opera' might have a negative impact on attendance of the show (Panenka 9).

An interesting fact is that, unlike most other rock operas, it was originally intended for the stage, and began life as a concept album only because of the seemingly inappropriate, but innovative approach to the old biblical story.[11]

In many ways, *Jesus Christ Superstar* has definitely more in common with *Hair*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show,* and the like than other rock operas from the 1970s. However, there is no spoken word to be found, similarly as in the classical opera, the whole story told only through singing. The musical theatre includes both spoken dialogue and songs. In the rock opera, most of the lyrics are presented by monologues in the form of arias and the entire musical work lacks dialogues that would help dramatize the storyline and make it more dynamic.

In order to avoid the excessive static nature that might arise from the absence of spoken words in rock operas, the writers needed to use the right means to make the work attractive enough for the audiences. That implies that the topic, song lyrics and the

[11] Probably for this very reason, the score does not consist entirely of rock songs – we notice that, besides rock, a wide range of other different musical genus have been used, including jazz, soul, blues, and even some elements of classical music.

music itself have to be catchy enough for the listener to capture his attention and maintain it over the course of time (Foret 6). In the case of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, this intention has been fulfilled – the show has experienced continuous success all over the world since its creation in the early 1970s, and one can hardly assume its popularity is going to fade away any time soon.

2. History of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Unlike other rock operas created as concept albums, Webber's and Rice's Jesus Christ Superstar was originally written to be performed on the stage. As Tim Rice admits, "largely thanks to Andrew [Lloyd Webber] we were trying to write for the theatre, not for records"[12] (*The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar).*

The authors' ambition was to stage the piece in the West End, however, their bold musical dramatization of the oldest biblical story would obviously stimulate controversy among the Christian communities. Therefore, the London producers at the time found the idea of introducing it to the theatres absurd. Webber explained that: "The reason *Jesus Christ Superstar* was recorded was because nobody would put it on stage. […] Every single producer in London said: 'You have to be joking. This is the worst idea in history!'" (*The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar).*

Jesus Christ Superstar was not the first collaboration between Webber and Rice. They met through a mutual friend in their teenage years. After the success they had with their first piece – a short musical called *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1968)[13] they decided their next project would be biblical as well.

When *Jesus Christ Super* was written Tim Rice was 25 and Andrew Lloyd Webber only 21 years old. The idea of telling the story of the final seven days of Jesus' life leading up to his crucifixion, came from Rice who says he first had the thought at the age of fifteen: "I always thought if one day I became a writer […] there would be a good subject – Judas Iscariot, the story from his point of view" (*The Making of Jesus*

[12] Rice's statement is not completely correct; Webber said in the interview in 2012 that his original intention was to see the rock opera performed in a rock arena ("Andrew Lloyd Webber talks Jesus Christ Superstar - UK Arena Tour").

[13] *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* was Webber's and Rice's first musical to be performed publicly. The very first work they wrote together was *The Likes of Us* (1965) that was not staged until 2005 (Smith 362).

Christ Superstar). As it turned out later, this choice would bring both Webber and Rice to international fame and ensure them a place in musical theatre history.

The main focus of the rock opera is placed on the relationship between Jesus and Judas, with the authors suggesting the reasons Judas might have had to betray someone he clearly loved so much. Judas is treated sympathetically – as a social revolutionary who sympathizes with the sick and the poor and searches for the ways to overthrow the Romans. In his opening number, *Heaven on their Minds*, he expresses his worries over Jesus' behavior. Judas believes his friend's image of the new Messiah might put them all in danger because they "are getting much too loud," and asks him to be more reasonable and down-to-earth.[14]

Jesus, on the other hand, is depicted not as a God, but as a vulnerable human being with doubts and fears who struggles to complete his mission. "Or else the story does not mean anything. If he was just a god or if he knew he was god then what's the suffering, what's the agony, where's the dilemma, where's the sacrifice?" (*The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar*).

Unlike the Bible where Judas and Jesus are described in a very black-and-white manner – Judas as the embodiment of evil and Jesus as the perfectly pure son of God – *Jesus Christ Superstar* provides us with a picture that is more realistic. Moreover, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a woman Judas scolds, the former prostitute who would like to make up for the sinful past by her current feelings for Jesus.

This controversial approach to the characters, and to the story as a whole, planted doubts in the theatre circles. Nobody could foretell how the stage adaptation of *Jesus Christ Superstar* would be received – young people might think the subject of the

[14] Carl Anderson, who later played the role of Judas Iscariot, believed that "[Judas] became involved with Jesus […] because Judas assumed that Jesus was a revolutionary. […] Gradually, […] Judas became disenchanted with Jesus, deciding that the leader's visibility was a liability to the essentially underground nature of their movement" (Walsh).

show is not interesting enough and the older generation might find it disrespectful. Reception of the album would decide the future of the rock opera.

The original album was released in 1970, featuring Deep Purple lead vocalist Ian Gillan as Jesus Christ, the Scottish singer Murray Head as Judas Iscariot, and Yvonne Elliman as Mary Magdalene.[15] They were accompanied by a 56 piece orchestra and a 14 piece vocal group Trinidad Singers (Panenka 8).

Much to the surprise of the authors, the record became extremely popular particularly in the United States. Rice says:

> When it came out it was cutting edge rock, and it was a number one album [in America] and a lot of people in America of certain age tend to remember it more as a rock album. But in England, Superstar is perceived more as a theatrical piece because the record wasn't very big in England when it came out. […] it was OK, made a bit of a noise but it was the show really that notched [*Jesus Christ*] *Superstar* in England whereas [in America] it was the album" (*The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar*).

Two songs from the record, Yvonne Elliman's *I Don't Know How To Love Him* and Murray Head's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, dominated the American pop charts long before the rock opera was performed on stage.

During the first decade of its existence, *Jesus Christ Superstar* was realized as a full-scale production both on Broadway and in the London West End. These performances were preceded by an official American concert tour that was launched by Robert Stigwood who had bought the rights for the production of the rock opera. The main reason was to fight a number of illegal productions that emerged after the release

[15] Elliman, originally from Hawaii, was discovered by Lloyd Webber himself while performing in a small night club in London. She said about their first encounter: "He said 'You are my Mary Magdalene!'" and offered her the role right on the spot (Lo).

of the album. Any attempts to present the piece in concert or dramatic form without the approval of Stigwood's company would be punishable by law.

The first American concert of the rock opera took place at the Civic Arena in Pittsburgh in 1971. Around 13,000 people came to see the show. As Webber later said in a press release for the show: "I shall never forget its first live performance […] Of course [*Jesus Christ Superstar*] subsequently became a legit theatre stalwart, but I, personally, have always hankered after seeing it again in the arenas where it started" (Seikaly).

The world premiere of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was staged at the Mark Hellinger Theatre in New York, on October 12, 1971, with Jeff Fenholt as Jesus and Ben Vereen as Judas, later taking turns with Carl Anderson, and Bob Bingham starred as Caiaphas. Once again, the part of Mary Magdalene was sung by Yvonne Elliman who also claimed the role in the movie version in 1973. Ted Neeley, a rock'n'roll singer and drummer, who later achieved international fame for his role of Jesus in Jewison's movie, was a Christ understudy in the Broadway production. "By the time *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened on Broadway, MCA [Records] had netted $16.5 million from the sale of more than two million albums and 600,000 tapes in the United States and Canada. Profits were also reaped from extensive sales of sheet music" (Denisoff, Romanowski 209). *Jesus Christ Superstar* was not just another show staged on Broadway. It became a huge event that captured a lot of attention of the media. The director Tom O'Horgan, who had previously staged the world premiere of the rock musical *Hair* (1968), took charge of the directing the piece.

Despite the success of the record album and the enormous amounts of publicity the Broadway production received, most of the critical reviews were not too enthusiastic, expressing disappointment rather than calling it a triumph. Taking pleasure

in shocking the audience, O'Horgan turned *Jesus Christ Superstar* into an extravagant spectacle with outrageous effects. The excessive usage of wind and smoke machines, laser beams, the stage filled with actors in fantastic costumes, and the crucifixion scene set on a golden triangle did not impress the critics.[16] On the contrary, many of them felt offended by O'Horgan's handling of the biblical theme. Besides, as many had predicted, the stage production provoked protests of certain religious groups who considered the show blasphemous.

However, "riding on the success of the album, […] the Broadway show ran strongly on its advance sales for about eight months before business began to fade in the spring of 1972. Tickets for a Broadway show were too expensive for the potentially large younger audience who wanted to see Superstar" (Denisoff, Romanowski 211). Eventually, the New York's first theatrical adaptation of Webber's and Rice's story closed on June 30, 1973 after "only" 711 performances.

Webber himself admitted he did not enjoy the Broadway premiere at all: "I hugely objected to the original New York production, which was probably the worst night of my life. It was a vulgar travesty" (Crompton). Fortunately for the authors, they were given a larger role in the London show which proved to be considerably more successful, running 3,358 performances during the next eight years.[17]

The West End saw a much more modest production of *Jesus Christ Superstar.* It opened at the Palace Theatre on August 9, 1972, starring Paul Nicholas as Jesus, Stephen Tate as Judas, Dana Gillespie as Mary Magdalene, John Parker as Pontius Pilate, and Paul Jabarra as Herod. The Australian director Jim Sharman was invited to

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[16] Carl Anderson was not a fan of O'Horgan's production either. As he said in an interview in 1974: "Broadway killed *Superstar*. Nobody had a negative thing to say about it until that Broadway production. O'Horgan had a budget of $750,000, and he used it to put *gaud* on stage – that's spelt G-A-U-D – with all the actors just competing with their costumes. There was too much spectacle. He used his actors like part of the scenery. That was not the intent of the thing at all."

[17] By the time of the derniere, *Superstar* had become the United Kingdom's longest-running musical/rock opera in the West End history.

London to stage *Jesus Christ Superstar* by Tim Rice himself, after the lyricist saw the original Sydney production directed by Sharman.[18] In comparison with Broadway, this version the rock opera was more intimate. The director did not use the flamboyant effects typical of Tom O'Horgan's production and, in the opinion of the authors, created a much more dignified show (Panenka 11). Webber explained that the main reason the West End show was such a success was probably the fact that it was much closer to a concert form than the Broadway production (Andrew Lloyd Webber talks Jesus Christ Superstar - UK Arena Tour).

Around the time of the London premiere in 1972, the preparations for the movie version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* began. The Canadian Norman Jewison had been picked by the record company to direct the movie. As far as the main cast is concerned, "two understudies from the Broadway production captured leading roles in the film version: Ted Neeley as Jesus and Carl Anderson as Judas. Yvonne Elliman, Barry Dennen, and Bob Bingham retained their parts for the film" (Denisoff, Romanowski 212)[19].

Before the shooting started in August 1972, the music score was recorded in London, with arrangements by André Previn and one exclusive song, *Then We Are Decided*, added by Rice and Webber. The movie also included the song *Could We Start Again, Please* that did not appear on the original LP release but was included in the Broadway version in 1971. Jewison had an idea to film in Israel – not only because of authenticity, but mainly because the Israeli government was keen to attract foreign filmmakers. Investments made in the Israel film received between a 20–25% rebate. This meant the MCA and Stigwood would only have to pay 75–80% of the overall costs

[18] Jim Sharman later rose to fame mainly as the screenwriter and director of the movie *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).
[19] Ian Gillan was offered the role of Jesus both in the West End and in the movie, however, he refused in order to focus on his career with Deep Purple.

for the movie, with the Israeli government covering the rest (Denisoff, Romanowski 211). The movie was released in summer 1973, and immediately triggered a new wave of protests. “The conservative Christian establishment found the portrayal of an earthy “rock and roll” Jesus with his long hair and hippie commune of male and female disciples to be disrespectful, if not sacrilegious” (Robert 6).

Curiously enough, it also seems that *Jesus Christ Superstar* has been helping renew interest in religion among young people. The combination of the humanity of the characters, the clear, straightforward language and the contemporary music appealed to the young generation more that what they knew from the church.

> For many American baby boomers in the 1970s, *Jesus Christ Superstar* blew like a fresh breeze across their predictable and boring suburban churches. Suddenly Jesus seemed like one of them. He defied authority, was filled with self-doubt, and ‘hung out’ with a pack of friends. Even before the rock opera opened on Broadway and in London, American high school students bought the record and staged their own productions (Robert 6).

Since the 1970s, the rock opera quickly became a worldwide musical phenomenon, with countless other productions staged across the globe.

The production history of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is not the primary focus of this thesis. For this reason, only the first translated versions and the more memorable productions are mentioned. The sources indicate that the sensation *Jesus Christ Superstar* caused calmed a bit down in the 1980s with a considerably lower number of new productions,

A new wave of productions, both in foreign languages and in English speaking countries, came at the beginning of the 1990s. Among these was also the first Czech

production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* that premiered in the Spirála Theatre and after four years of constant performing became the longest running musical/rock opera in the country, with 1288 performances.

Among the first foreign incarnations were the shows performed in Göteborg, Sweden (1972)[20] and in Sydney, Australia (May 1972). The Australian production later moved to Melbourne where it ran until February, 1974.

In 1973, the adaptation of the show in French language opened in Paris,[21] followed by the first Spanish-language production in Mexico in 1974.

Apart from the above-mentioned productions, the show keeps coming back both to New York and London. It was revived on Broadway in 1977, in 2000 and in 2012. After 16 years since the first production at the Palace Theatre, the West End welcomed *Jesus Christ Superstar* again at the Lyceum Theatre in 1996.[22]

In 2000, the second film adaptation of the rock opera was released, featuring Glenn Carter as Jesus Christ, Jerome Pradon as Judas Iscariot, and Renne Castle as Mary Magdalene. The movie was inspired by the 1996 London revival and directed by the same director – Gale Edwards.

The last incarnation to be mentioned is the *Jesus Christ Superstar – Arena Tour 2012*. The production featured Tim Minchin as Judas Iscariot, Jesus as Ben Forster and Melanie Chisholm as Mary Magdalene. Performed in large music halls both in the UK and in Australia, this show has become one of the most successful productions of the year.

Apparently, Webber's and Rice's creation has been quite immune to all the criticism it has received in the theatre reviews as well as from the Christian groups. On

[20] The show was performed in the Swedish language and featured the singer Agnetha Fältskog who would later become famous as one of the members of the singing group ABBA.
[21] This production did not impress the French critics and stopped after only 30 shows (Smith 65).
[22] The show cast, among others, Alice Cooper as King Herod.

the contrary, its success does not lie only in Webber's music it is the subject itself that makes *Jesus Christ Superstar* appealing to so many different people.

3. Many shapes of *Jesus Christ Superstar*

3.1 Timeliness of *Jesus Christ Superstar*

For over the last four decades, *Jesus Christ Superstar* has seen countless productions around the world. From the on-stage shows in the famous theatres, national tours, amateur school and church performances to three film adaptations and numerous recordings, the rock opera remains in the centre of attention, enchanting audiences of all age groups. Andrew Lloyd Webber's music has proved to be timeless, appealing to the listener as much as it was in the early 1970s. As the author himself has admitted: "I don't think I could write that today, I don't think it would have come out the way that it did. […] It should stay as it is, I would never want to change the orchestration" (*The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar).* Nevertheless, with every new incarnation comes a new approach to the work. The essence of *Jesus Christ Superstar* reaches far beyond the religious tradition, as the story focuses on the earthly aspect of the figure of Jesus and not on his divinity. As a result, his character comes across as more human and, thus, easier for the audience to identify with. Mirroring the current times, Tim Rice's Jesus does not open the way to the afterlife for us, he shows us the way towards living a moral life instead. That is "why politics takes center stage here instead of religion. After all, politics is how humans decide collective morality, questions of how to live morally in a community […] and of which values will be shared by that community" (Miller).

The themes of identity, ideology, rebellion against the authority, as well as the overwhelming cult of personality can be applied to any culture of any period of human history. Both Judas and Jesus could metaphorically represent the ideas and visions of the young generation of 1970s as well as the young people of the 21st century.

The nature of the rock opera as a cycle of songs that tells a story makes *Jesus Christ Superstar* a rather straightforward musical piece that is completely

understandable to its audience without relying on any visual elements.[23] After all, the LP found its way to the charts before it got on stage. The libretto consists primarily of the song lyrics, with not too many staging notes. This gives the director more freedom to adapt the storyline to the current issues or, possibly, any other issues that he or she finds interesting. In this manner, Jesus and his companions can be removed from the distant past of the 1st century Palestine and face the obstacles of our time.

As far as the main cast is concerned, rock stars as well as singers and actors classically trained in musical theatre have been hired for key singing roles. The tradition of casting rock stars has been common since the first recording of *Jesus Christ Superstar* where Deep Purple frontman Ian Gillan sang the part of Jesus. Jeff Fenholt, famous for his role of Christ in the original Broadway show in 1971, later became involved with the British heavy metal band Black Sabbath. In 1996, Alice Cooper provided vocals for the King Herod's song on the London revival version.[24]

With this variety of the types of cast, one item has always seemed to stay consistent. The physical appearance of Jesus is probably the only case where every major production remains more or less faithful to the original biblical story. We are unlikely to find an actor playing Christ who would not have long hair, light skin and a slender build. On the other hand, both in the New York premiere and in the 1973 movie version, the prominent role of Judas Iscariot was portrayed by African American actors: Ben Vereen on Broadway and Carl Anderson in Norman Jewison's film. Similarly, Yvonne Elliman's Hawaiian descent[25] did not stand in the way of her becoming, arguably, the rock opera's most famous Mary Magdalene. In short, ethnicity has never really been relevant in casting the actors.

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[23] As Andrew Lloyd Webber describes the story: "It goes just like a train – from A to B. That's what it does. I think the construction of *Superstar* is the reason why it kept going."
[24] The tendency to cast rock stars in *Jesus Christ Superstar* was especially strong in the Czech production of the rock opera in the 1990s where practically the whole cast consisted of rock singers.
[25] Elliman is also partially Japanese and partially Irish ("Yvonne Elliman – IMDb").

When it comes to clothing, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is one of those shows that allow the costume designers to combine modern clothing with period dress,[26] to link up the past with the present. The level of mixing fashion trends differs in every incarnation of the rock opera – some adaptations are inspired only by contemporary fashion styles whereas, in other cases, the costume designers make the historic elements a dominant feature. Foreign productions sometimes bring along their own traditional costumes, e.g. the Japanese show introduced a kabuki version of the rock opera, creating a fusion between the East and the West.[27] In general, the choice of clothing depends mostly on the concept of the particular production.

The same can be claimed about scenography – from the original movie shot in 1973 right on location in Israel to huge rock arenas and stadiums with a live rock band and a gigantic monitor over the stage to project intimate close-ups on the backdrops – there are countless possibilities of interpretation, as long as the budget is sufficient to fund the project.

With the variety of different approaches, comparing one version to another happens quite naturally.

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[26] As depicted by the traditional European religious art.

[27] Andrew Lloyd Webber became particularly fond of the Japanese production. In 1991, the show was brought to London where it ran for one week. Webber said after the premiere: "It is the best production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* I have ever seen. It's what we should have opened with in America 20 years ago. And I meant that" (Kaye).

3.2 Three versions of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*

The main focus of this chapter is to analyse three incarnations of *Jesus Christ Superstar* – Norman Jewison's 1973 movie, the video recording of the *Jesus Christ Superstar* - 2012 Live Arena Tour in the United Kingdom directed by Laurence Connor and the first official Czech production of the rock opera in 1994 and. Each of these adaptations represents a cultural phenomenon that, for one reason or another, responded to the needs of its time.

3.2.1 Norman Jewison's 1973 film adaptation of *Jesus Christ Superstar*

In August 1972, not long after the Broadway premiere, the fifteen-week-long filming of the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* began in Israel. For many people, this interpretation would become the ultimate adaptation of Webber's and Rice's famous rock opera. The Canadian director Norman Jewison, who had already gained international success with his mystery drama film *In the Heat of the Night*[28] and also with the film version of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, decided to bring the story back to the Holy Land. As he said: "I don't like to studio that much, I like being on location. I like going to where the story takes place" (Poland). The great heat of the Israeli desert did not stop him from moving the whole crew and the cast to where Jesus is believed to have spent the last seven days of his life.

Prior to the shooting, Jewison together with the screenwriter Melvyn Bragg spent some time in the Negev desert, wandering around Beersheba, Nazareth, the ruins of Avdat, the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, looking for images that might be used in

[28] In 1967, the movie *In the Heat of the Night* was nominated for seven Academy Awards, winning five.

the movie. Eventually, they found enough places for filming without actually having to use any buildings – the only inside scenes in the movie take place in a cave.

The fact that the movie was shot on location is one of its strongest points. There are two simple reasons for this: first of all, the wilderness of the landscape with its huge mountains and canyons provided impressive scenery with countless possibilities for extraordinary shots, making it rather difficult for every other production to compete with this movie.[29] Second of all, in the connection to the original biblical story, the setting of *Jesus Christ Superstar* cannot possibly get any "more real" than that.

However, this authenticity does not make it through the first scene before we start asking ourselves questions: put aside the modern scaffolding by the ruins of Avdat, is that a bus riding through the desert? In the cloud of dust, it arrives at the foot of the hill where Avdat sits, and a bunch of young hippies gets off, wearing clothes popular in the 1970s.[30] What we see is a group of traveling actors, bound by friendship, who plan to present their own version of the last week of the life of Jesus.

Right at the very beginning, the filmmakers make it clear their interpretation does not have strong ties with historical reality or with the Bible. On the contrary, this version contains a considerable number of references to the present, including fashion, political events and social tendencies.

The economic and social situation in America in the early 1970s was tense. Marginalized people, i.e. women and minorities, continued in their fight for equality.

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[29] Roger Ebert describes the scenery: "There are extreme long shots of the characters isolated in a vast wilderness; there are lonely shots into the sun of ancient monuments; and there's one absolutely stunning shot that shows us an apparently empty landscape and then tilts down to reveal Jesus and his disciples in a gigantic sunlit cavern."

[30] Jewison explained his motives this introduction in the interview: "We saw a bus one day full of tourists and there was an Arab writing on it, it was a bus coming, I think, from Jordan, and it was coming to the ruins, a lot of dust, and all these people piled off the bus in their shorts [...] and I said: 'That's the idea, we got it! We'll just put a lot of these kids – singers, dancers, actors with all their costumes and we'll put them on a bus, and we'll have them arrive, and they're gonna do their version of this opera outside. And it worked'" (Poland).

Americans protested against the Vietnam War.[31] The counterculture movement still dominated among young people who expressed their revolt against the American government by creating their own values that included living in communes independent of the American social system.

The idea of living together in harmony and peace popular among the hippies is actually very similar to the moral values promoted by Jesus Christ. Consequently, many young people at this time sought to find comfort through spiritual and religious experiences.

As far as music is concerned, rock music continued to play a significant role among the young generation. Moreover, the genre of disco became one of the biggest trends during the 1970s.

This overview does not cover all tendencies of the period. However, the above mentioned aspects of the early 1970s are those that have been incorporated in Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Over the overture, each character is introduced by the camera while the preparations are being made. The actors put on their costumes, the props, including guns and a large wooden cross, are unloaded from the top of the bus and the story can begin.

The characters in the story can be divided into two major groups – Jesus and his disciples on one side and the authorities on the other. The authorities in *Jesus Christ Superstar* are represented by three branches: Pontius Pilates with the Roman army, the corrupted clergy ruled by Caiaphas, and Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee.

The political forces are under the lead of Pontius Pilate while Caiaphas, played by Bob Bingham, is in charge of the religious forces in Israel. According to the New

[31] The movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* was filmed while the American troops were still fighting in Vietnam.

Testament, during Christ's life, the priests – the Pharisees and Sadducees – were the leaders of the Judaistic religion, but also a powerful political movement. Having been entrusted with a considerable amount of responsibility, they represented the ruling class in the country together with the Romans: "It was the normal Roman practice to leave most of the running of the government to local leader. […] In return for their support for Roman rule, the Sadducees kept their wealth and privileged position secure" (Spriggs). Jewison's portrayal of the priesthood is basically the same as what we find in the Bible. As the highest-ranking religious figures, the priests are said to be in direct connection to God's will. Nevertheless, their manners are rotten and corrupted. Instead of taking proper care of the well-being of the people of Jerusalem, they use their social status to line their own pockets with money. Their biggest interest is to maintain the political power they hold in their hands and, in order to do so, they have to stay on good terms with the Romans.

An important moment that demonstrates the hypocrisy of the priests is a dynamic scene in the temple, known in the New Testament as a narrative called "Cleansing of the Temple." Similarly to the Bible, Jesus, terrified by what has become of the place, overturns the tables of the money changers, and expels all the sellers and buyers out of the temple (Mark 11:15-19; RSV). Jewison did not violate the concept of the episode. He merely added contemporary references; a modern market where vendors, money lenders and drug dealers are doing business, prostitutes and strippers dressed in provocative modern clothes are dancing on the tables, and the stalls sell all kinds of good from postcards, fruit and expensive fabrics to grenades and machine guns.

Christ's protest against materialism and bad morals could take place practically in any society in any period in human history. Jewison chose to point out the things he

found evil in his contemporary life. At the same time, he did not completely leave the biblical world.

The lyrics used in the scene are almost identical with the original biblical verses but the dramatic atmosphere of the whole number is increased by Webber's expressive music. Frenetically singing in a high-pitched voice, Jesus storms through the market and breaks everything around. We notice that the priests are present the whole time, carefully watching the scene from their scaffolding. At first glance it is evident they approve of what has been done to the temple – the market serves as an important source of money and Jesus is ruining its purpose by trying to open people's eyes.

In the 1973 film version of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the priests are given an extra song, *Then We Are Decided*, for us to develop a deeper understanding of their situation. During this private discussion between Caiaphas and his right hand Annas, we learn that, although Caiaphas is "the law and order" of the priesthood, it is mainly Annas who pulls the strings and persuades the highest priest to summon the council ("Say so to the council, but don't rely on subtlety, frighten them or they won't see."). Thus, in the movie, Jesus' fate is more or less decided before the actual council meeting takes place. During the song *This Jesus Must Die*, Caiaphas merely informs his subordinates about his plans. Fearing their own "elimination because of one man," the priests make the final decision to kill Jesus Christ.

The physical appearance of the priests puts a smile of the viewer's face. Dressed in fantastic black costumes, "consisting of enormous, bizarrely shaped hats, long capes, and bare chests crossed with leather straps and chain" (Grace 95), they spend most of their time on a modern scaffolding, "looking down" on everybody. This image of the

priests standing on the scaffolding is actually supposed to resemble black vultures, watching over their prey.[32]

Designing the costumes of the priests, Yvonne Blake, the costume designer, used grotesque elements without mocking the characters. The same approach has been applied to King Herod's little vaudeville number, performed by Joshua Mostel. Although possessing great power, Herod shows up in the movie wearing Bermuda shorts and amber glasses. He seems to spend most of his days "hanging out" by the Dead Sea with a group of scantily clad dancers wearing strong, flamboyant makeup and coloured wigs.

This comical scene definitely lightens the gloomy mood that dominates the second half of the movie. Herod's mocking of Christ's celebrity status seems to be quite harmless at first. Nevertheless, he is pictured as a rich party boy who is used to getting everything he desires. Consequently, when Jesus does not show him any miracles as he has been asked, Herod reacts like a hysterical spoiled child. This evident lack of sympathy demonstrates the fact that, apart from being friendly and "fun", he is also able to act like a very ruthless ruler.

Both King Herod and the Jewish priests are a part of the ruling class, nevertheless, the country is under the dominion of Rome. It is Pontius Pilate who has been chosen a supreme ruler by Caesar himself. When Jesus is brought to his "hallway", Pilate makes it clear that he does not wish to interfere in his case. Being a foreigner in the country, he wants to stay neutral. Pilate realizes the hypocrisy of the priests who only have in mind their personal well-being, so he can clearly see the reasons why they are afraid of Jesus' growing popularity. However, he does not consider Christ to be his own enemy or the enemy of Rome. After all, Jesus has never proclaimed himself the

[32] Jewison makes his point quite clear when he shows us two shots – one of vultures circling their prey, followed by another with the priests in black robes on scaffolding, made to resemble the vultures looking over the people.

King of the Jews. If he did, the issue would become political, but at this point, he does not seem to be a threat to Rome.

Unlike the rest of the authorities, the figure of Pilate is meant to look authentic in the movie. His outfit, a heavy purple velvet cloak and a golden laurel wreath on his head, shows no signs of modern fashion trends. Though not historically authentic, it is still close to the modern perception of what the Romans might look like.[33] Besides, Barry Dennen, who plays Pilate, has a characteristic Roman-nose profile, which adds more authenticity to his character.

In the ancient world, purple dye was very rare and expensive – only the rich could afford to have it used on their clothes. Subsequently, it became the colour of Roman royalty, indicating their high social status (McGeough 234). Nevertheless, Pilate is not the only person in *Jesus Christ Superstar* who wears purple. Every one of his soldiers and temple guards is dressed in a purple tank top, khaki military boots and military pants. Sometimes, they are armed with spears or swords, at other times, with the modern submachine guns. Altogether, their clothes do not have much of an "ancient" quality to them.

Of all the representatives of the authority, Roman soldiers are clearly the strongest reference to the present time, i.e. to the turbulent political events of the year 1972, when the movie was shot. Although the analogy to the Vietnam War is never made explicit, the tension between the Romans and the Jewish priests on one side, and Jesus with his disciples on the other is an obvious allusion to the American counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Young people of this era expressed their frustration about the war and about social inequality, blaming the American government for the violence that war brings. However, their opposition was rarely of

[33] In her book *Reconstructing reality of images*, Maria G. Parani describes the variety of different costumes that Pilate has been depicted wearing.

violent nature – on the contrary, the hippies believed that living together in harmony and piece was necessary. Possibly for this very reason, we do not witness any physical violence between Christ's followers and the forces of the authorities,[34] as non-violent way of living was an important part of the ideology of the hippie movement.

Similarly to the hippie communes of the 1960s and 1970s, Christ and his friends also seem to live in harmony as a small community of people who share the same interests and ideals, yearning for complete freedom and independence. This impression is intensified by the fact that all the members of the company are dressed in a hybrid between hippie clothes and traditional biblical garments.

The racial equality, quite obvious among the young disciples, is also of great importance as it represented the main goal of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in America. Above all, Christ's followers, singing and dancing to Webber's edgy music often look more like a group of flower children at Woodstock.

The only two exceptions are the characters of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. The physical image of Christ, as portrayed by Ted Neeley, thoroughly corresponds with the way he is often depicted in religious art. The simple white robe he wears, together with his long fair hair, wispy beard and the innocent look in his eyes seem to be perfectly plausible.

The same can be said about the character of Mary Magdalene: kneeling at Christ's feet as the penitent sinner, or weeping beneath the cross when Jesus is crucified, Yvonne Elliman in her soft orange dress remains more or less faithful to the traditional portrayal of Jesus' dear companion (Maisch 179).

As the story develops, the harmonic atmosphere in the community is disrupted by the growing popularity of Christ and, consequently, by Judas Iscariot's disapproval

[34] With the exception of the flogging and crucifixion itself.

of his friend's behaviour. Judas' motives appear to be entirely unselfish – he still sees Jesus as his spiritual leader.[35] However, he notices the disciples started to give more significance to Jesus himself than to his ideology: "…all the good you've done will soon be swept away, you began to matter more than the things you say." Christ seems to have lost touch with reality and Judas is the only one who finds his new image of God misleading.

The dramatic conflict between Judas and Jesus is crucial to the whole story. Judas disapproves of the myth that has been created around Christ and constantly keeps questioning his divinity. What worries him most is the large amount of attention that has been drawn to their community: "…we are getting much too loud, and they'll crush us if we go too far."

When Judas realizes his warnings have not been taken seriously by any of his companions, he decides to end the "Jesus-mania" and seek out "the help" of the priests. In Jewison's movie, this is the essential moment of the whole story as it triggers all the following events. As such, it gave the director a reason to shoot two, arguably, most controversial scenes of the movie. The first one, a short instrumental intermezzo between songs, is a famous shot of Judas being chased across the desert by military tanks,[36] ironically accompanied by two flutes playing a seemingly peaceful melody. The tanks in this scene may be explained as the driving force that pushed Judas to make his decision. Later, after he meets with the priests and tells Caiaphas and Annas where they can find Jesus alone, two jets fly over his head, possibly, symbolizing the irreversibility of his actions. Again, the modern inventions, used in both of these scenes, were intended to resonate with contemporary, i.e. 1970s society.

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[35] Judas' opinion is revealed to us in the very first song of the rock opera, *Heaven on Their Minds*. Here, he expresses his feeling, singing: "And believe me, my admiration for you hasn't died. But every word you say today, gets twisted round some other way... "

[36] These were American tanks that had been used by Israeli Army in the Six-Day War (Jewison, Neeley).

When the viewers get used to characters' bizarre costumes, the allusions to the present, and have a good laugh at Herod's Charleston dance, they may think nothing in the movie can surprise them anymore. Nevertheless, the most extravagant number is yet to come.

During the song *Superstar*, Judas Iscariot makes a post-mortem appearance as he "descends from heaven" on a crane like a giant white angel, hanging on a silver cross. Although the crane was not originally meant to be seen in the shot, the fact that we can clearly see that Judas does not really fly out of the sky makes the shot even more amusing.[37]

The paradox of this scene lies in the fact that it is not Jesus, but Judas who is presented as the Superstar. He seems to have lost the concern for Jesus that he used to have and approaches his former friend with a large dose of sarcasm and skepticism. Accompanied by a group of showgirls in glittery white, disco-inspired clothing, he comes back to Earth one last time in order to question Christ's life choices. However, while he is giving him serious questions[38] he shows off and does a disco song, surrounded by the dancers in all their glory. The reference to modern pop culture is indisputable, the scene looks like a music video with Motown artists performing in a large music amphitheatre.[39]

Although Judas betrayed Jesus and helped the authorities arrest him, for this song, he is given a status of celebrity, previously associated with Christ's name. As it happens in real life, popularity of a person does not always depend on their good deeds.

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[37] Jewison commented on this scene: "My big problem was, I couldn't get the light off the crane. […] I said, 'We're going to leave it!' Because I wanted him […] floating magically…" (Jewison, Neeley).
[38] ("Who are you? What have you sacrificed?", "Do you think you're what they say you are?", "Do you mean to die like that, was that a mistake?")
[39] In addition to that, Rice wrote the lyrics of this song as an explicit reference to the present, we hear Judas singing: "Why'd you choose such a backward time in such a strange land? If you'd come today you could have reached the whole nation. Israel in 4 B.C. had no mass communication."

Towards the end of the song, this disco performance begins to alternate with shots of Jesus carrying the cross on his way to Golgotha, followed by his grieving disciples. The end of Christ's earthly existence is inevitably coming.

The crucifixion itself is brief. Crowned with thorns and clad only in a loincloth, Jesus is raised on the cross just as the Gospels describe it, with the soldiers in modern military clothes being the difference. The sound for this scene had to be re-synchronized with the movie in London after coming back from Israel as the original recording did not provide an accurate length for the video. Jewison commented on how the crucifixion was filmed:

> All this had to be rewritten and re-orchestrated. And, Andre Previn,[40] this is where he ran over to the piano and he started to play. […] we had this sustaining St. Paul's Boys Choir. And they're holding, and he goes over and starts this [improvisation on the piano] I didn't have anything at this point; so I was shooting almost blind (Jewison, Neeley).

The story of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is supposed to end right here, with the crucifixion, without any hint of resurrection of Jesus Christ. After all, the authors decided to focus on Christ's humanity and, possibly for this reason, the rock opera does not include any mentions of his afterlife.

Instead of the resurrection, the actors come back to the bus, not wearing their costumes anymore. There are no signs of enthusiasm that was evident at the beginning of the story when they arrived in the desert. The cast quietly boards the bus and drives off, with one element missing – Jesus.

[40] the conductor of the recording

The movie suddenly takes on a deeper meaning during the very last scene. Although it started with a "story inside of a story" concept, at the end of it all, the actor who played Jesus never shows up. The last thing we see is a long shot of the sun setting over Boghota while a shepherd with his flock are crossing the horizon. The cross is still standing on the hill, however, Christ's body is nowhere to be seen. Some viewers may find the moment of resurrection in this shot – the shepherd definitely adds a mystical feel to the whole scene even though originally he was not supposed to be in it.[41]

From what has been mentioned above, it is obvious that Jewison was not trying to create a historically correct or a deeply religious piece. Even if he had wanted to, the way Webber's and Rice's story is written would have made it impossible to carry out the plan.

At the same, the director does not try to avoid the connection with the Bible either. He only offers us a stylized presentation of the life and message of Jesus Christ, not approaching the story as a central event in the Christian tradition.

Jewison was definitely inspired by the New Testament in many aspects but never lost touch with the present.

The setting of the movie is closer to being authentic than any stage production possibly can be. However, if we omit the scenes shot in the cave, every episode was filmed in open air which put certain scenes in a rather unrealistic light.[42] The closest we get to a building are the ruins of Avdat. These minimalistic sets leave enough space for us to fill in the details with our own imagination.

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[41] Jewison said: "Something happened that was totally improvised. […] All of a sudden, a figure appeared. […] I realized the figure was that of a shepherd. He appeared out of nowhere, and the flock of sheep following this apparition, almost, this ghostly figure. […] it remained in the film, but we were just there to shoot a sunset" (Jewison, Neeley).

[42] E.g. The scene in the temple does not actually take place in the temple. In the song *Pilate and Christ*, Pilate opens the number singing: "Who is this broken man cluttering up my hallway."

The costumes of the cast are an interesting mash-up of the present and the past with a pinch of both extravagance and humour. With surprising effectiveness, the costume designer Yvonne Blake combines contemporary clothes with "period" dresses, making time and space rather irrelevant. Throughout the whole movie we constantly encounter references and allusions to the modern time with its events and lifestyle.

In addition to the above mentioned, by using the form of a "story inside of a story", Jewison linked the story itself with elements typical of a theatrical play.

3.2.2 *Jesus Christ Superstar* – UK Arena Tour 2012

Forty years after its UK premiere at London's Pallace Theatre in the West End, the rock opera was introduced to the British public in 2012 as the first ever arena tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar* to be performed in the United Kingdom. Under the auspices of Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Really Useful Group and AEG Live, the production kicked off at London O2 Arena and visited altogether eleven cities on the British Isles.[43]

This reincarnation featured famous names from the world of music: the Australian musical comedian Tim Minchin[44] played Judas Iscariot, the role of Mary Magdalene was performed by the former "Spice Girl" Melanie Chisholm. The radio and television host Chris Moyles accepted Webber's offer to play King Herod. The producers decided to leave to choice of who would play Jesus Christ to the public and launched the search in the form of a reality show Superstar.[45] As a result, Ben Forster was crowned the winner of the competition and went on to play the role of Jesus in the UK arena tour.

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[43] andrewlloydwebber.com
[44] the co-writer of the famous West End musical Matilda
[45] Webber said about his decision to launch a talent search: "No audition process is perfect, the West End audition conventional process is very imperfect, the TV casting is a better way of finding, in my view, new talent and finding exciting talent, than it is through the conventional West End route."

This version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* can be described as "returning home" or "back to the roots" production. In the interview promoting the tour arena, Andrew Lloyd Webber confessed he had always wanted the piece to be performed this way rather than at the West End theatres: "Its first incarnations ever were in rock arenas in American and that's what I wanted to do in Britain again in the way that I originally […] intended it. […] It really isn't a West End or Broadway show. Never was" (*Andrew Lloyd Webber talks Jesus Christ Superstar - UK Arena Tour*). However, what makes this incarnation special is not the fact that it was produced as arena tour. For the first time in the history of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, technology of filming has reached the level when it is able to shoot a rock opera, a musical or a concert of a rock band in a live performance in quality not different from movies. Sitting in the audience of 13,000 people in a large music undoubtedly makes watching the show an exciting experience. Nevertheless, now it is also possible to enjoy the performances from the comfort of people's homes.

The stage itself is designed in a very simple way. Every scene takes place on a staircase with minimal equipment used throughout the story. The substantial element of the production is a large screen at the rear of the stage that serves two purposes: to magnify the cast for the audience to see the acting in detail and, secondly, it is an important means of storytelling that help visualize the whole concept of the show. There are the whole images of buildings so the audience knows where the scene takes place, along with other imagery throughout the show. Furthermore, the screen is particularly crucial for portraying the aspect of media that is of great significance in the 2012 arena tour.

In addition to all that, the rock band has become an inherent part of the production as they play their instruments on both sides of the stage. As a result, this form of staging draws the whole show very close to a live concert.

Similarly to Jewison's 1973 movie, the 2012 version redefines *Jesus Christ Superstar* for contemporary viewers, with the focus placed on the current events and public concerns. The key idea of the show is to provide a manifest against capitalism, consumerism and brainwashed life style. Moreover, Laurence Connor, the director of the production, added a new crucial aspect to the show: media is presented as an invisible enemy of common people, an evil force that penetrates our lives.

As far as authenticity of the story is concerned, we notice a complete diversion from the biblical materials. Obviously, the lyrics of *Jesus Christ Superstar* remain practically the same with very few alterations or additions. However, unlike in the 1973 version where all the characters are real historical figures, in the 2012 production their names are perceived in a rather symbolic way.

As a result, we do not have to look for references to the modern world. Everything that happens on the stage is indisputably situated in the 21st century. With no exceptions, the costumes of the actors are designed in the contemporary fashion without any traces of the past or bizarreness. Furthermore, all the characters use modern electronic devices: Christ's disciples are his followers both in real life and on social networks – they wander around the stage holding mobile phones and laptops in their hands, sending tweets to show their support for Jesus.

The whole company around Christ is presented as a group of young rebels who lead campaigns against political authorities. Unlike the flower children in Jewison's movie, these disciples are not afraid of physical confrontation. On the whole, this incarnation of *Jesus Christ Superstar* includes much more physical violence than the

1973 movie where it was limited to the obligatory minimum – the flogging and crucifixion itself.

The figure of Mary Magdalene in particular has undergone an interesting transformation. With long dreadlocks and dressed in a white dress, black leather jacket, and leather boots, she does not seem to be presented as a prostitute anymore, but rather as a modern girl living an alternative lifestyle. A sentence "He's just a man and I've had so many men before in very many ways, he's just one more" uttered in the 21st century does not indicate she has been selling her body for money but merely that she has had a rich sex life. Jewison' Mary Magdalene, on the other hand, is unlikely to lead such a free lifestyle as the ties with the biblical story are much stronger in the 1973 movie.

The police forces Jesus and his followers are fighting against are also remarkably different from the soldiers in purple tank tops and chrome helmets that we saw in Jewison's film. Laurence Connor did not include allusions to any war events. However, the riot gear, batons and shields are explicit impersonations of protection used by police in real life. Consequently, these men are a representation of repressive forces, the state authority that stands in direct conflict with young rebels. Some might find a close connection to the now infamous London riots as they took place only one year before this concept of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was introduced. The image of the rebels throwing Molotov cocktails at the police looks like a faithful imitation of the TV news from August 2011. Others might notice a link between the camp with the pop-up tents where Christ's community stays and the St. Paul's protests in February 2012.

The portrayal of the ruling class in the arena tour production has been significantly redefined. In order to cut out the link between the biblical tradition and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the institution of religion has been completely removed from the rock opera. The Jewish priests with funny big black hats and square breastplates have

been replaced by smooth but ruthless businessmen who are willing to do anything to protect their political interests and power.

In Jewison's movie, we can find a small hint of Caiaphas' admiration for Jesus when he admits: "one thing I'll say for him: Jesus is cool". In the arena tour version, this sentence has been replaced by a new line, "infantile sermons, the multitude drools" which quite radically changes the way Caiaphas sees Christ. If he felt any sympathy towards him in the 1973 movie, it vanished completely by the year 2012. The "new" Caiaphas parades around the stage with a glass of bourbon in his hand showing no signs of mercy in his face.

The nature of the organization that these mysterious men in suits represent is rather unclear. However, their logos with an eye symbol and 'super omnes' written on it[46] as well as the dark nature of the scene during the song *This Jesus Must Die* allude to an overseeing and secret illuminati type agency. It resides in a monumental building with a super high level protection system; Caiaphas and Annas can see Judas coming long before he rings the bell. Compared to the large dark halls and the cameras, Jewison's image of the priests standing on scaffolding becomes even more bizarre.

Another major change related to the portrayal of the priests lies in the way the scene The Temple has been redefined. The market full of sellers, prostitutes and money lenders have turned into a regular 21st century night club with almost naked go-go-dancers and drug dealers. We could generalize this group as the people living consumerist lifestyle. Jesus arrives at the place and, both enraged and desperate at the same time, stands out against the immoral behaviour of the people around him and, eventually, drives everybody out of the nightclub. Although Caiaphas and his colleagues are not present in this scene, it is quite obvious why Christ's actions pose a

[46] In Latin super omnes = above all, i.e. superior to everyone.

threat to their existence. Jesus is trying to change the values of the club visitors and the values of people in general. His efforts might have a negative impact on the welfare of the group around Caiaphas. They do not want the system to change as they benefit from the way it works now. Thus, he represents a threat to them and must be gotten rid of.

In legal matters, Caiaphas and his colleagues are still bound by the legal system. Consequently, in the eyes of the public, their decisions have to be approved by legal authorities. That is the reason why, to get rid of Jesus Christ, they need a "blessing" from Pontius Pilate, played by Alex Hanson. Wearing a court dress with a white stiff wing collar with bands and a short white wig in his first scene (*Pilate's dream*), we notice that Pilate's image has been transformed into an image of a judge. However, this outfit might only indicate the fact that Pilate holds a powerful political position with a great influence on people's lives as we don't see him dressed in this way in the rest of the scenes.

Moreover, we also learn that Pilate likes to stay in good shape under the supervision of a personal trainer. The first encounter between Pilate and Christ takes place during Pilate's cool-down time after jogging.[47] Acting quite indifferent, he seems more interested in the push-ups he is doing than in Jesus' fate and future. Although he gives him the obligatory questions ("We all know that you are news, but are you King?, King of the Jews?"), he obviously intends to stay uninvolved in the issue and dismissively sends him away. Pilate's lack of concern might work as an allusion to the evasive attitude the government representatives often choose towards the problems of common people.

Jewison's Pilate refused to deal with Jesus as well, however, in his case this was not caused by a lack of interest. Barry Dennen as Pilate gives an impression of a rather

[47] Pilate's effort to stay in good shape can be seen as an allusion to American politicians who are expected to promote healthy lifestyle in order to improve their public image.

weak, nervous and indecisive ruler who worries about his own future. In the arena tour production, on the other hand, Pilate evidently considers dealing with this case just a waste of time. Only later, during the trial of Jesus does he realize how serious the situation has become, realizing the mysterious dream he had a few nights before might have predicted the future.

After his encounter with Pilate, Jesus is sent to see Herod who in this production represents "the King of media".

As has been mentioned above, media plays an extremely important role in the arena tour production as it is present in almost every scene and has an immense power over human minds. Throughout the whole time, the story of Christ is under strict scrutiny of media. It broadcasts the demonstrations organized by him and his followers as well as his arrest, prosecution, and the trial before Pilate.

In this production, media is presented as a collective character that contributes significantly to Christ's condemnation. After being arrested, Jesus instantly gets surrounded by cameramen and television reporters asking him all kinds of questions. For this purpose, Rice's libretto resisted the burden of time without any "injuries"; there was no need to alternate any of the lines. The citizens of Jerusalem from the 1973 version have been simply replaced by TV reporters who are asking Jesus: "Tell me, Christ, how you feel tonight?", "Do you plan to put up a fight?", "What would you say were your big mistakes?", etc.

Primarily, however, the phenomenon of media has pervaded King Herod's comical performance, making him change his fancy white Bermuda shorts and amber glasses for a shiny red velvet suit. If there is an official leader of media in this production, it is definitely Herod.

Not accidentally, Andrew Lloyd Webber decided to offer the role of Herod to the English radio presenter Chris Moyles famous mainly for hosting the popular BBC Radio 1 Breakfast Show. Webber explained that King Herod is "one of the roles you have to have somebody who is media savvy to do [it]." Moyles has been turned into a game show host who welcomes Jesus Christ as his highly respected guest. He is seated in a scruffy leather swivel chair like a dump puppet while Herod, surrounded by his smiling female dancers in short golden dresses, amuses the audience. Christ never tries to say anything in his own defense. He does not want to become a part of the game because he realizes it is Herod's game and he can never win.

Laurence Connor was very imaginative in creating the concept of this scene. The point of his show is to let the people decide whether Jesus is "the Lord or a fraud". In the libretto for this production, Herod is given a few extra line to address the viewers, asking them to vote for (Lord) or against (Fraud) setting Christ free. Eventually, he is found guilty, of course. We also learn that the results have been predetermined and Herod is "clearly going to find Jesus guilty of being a fraud otherwise it would be a very short Act 2."

This scene demonstrates the immense amount of power media moguls possess. Herod's social position seems to be unassailable – he influences and controls people by means of entertainment while they sit in the comfort of their living rooms. At the same time, he supports the social system that he is such an important part of. In this production, Herod is depicted as a very cynical man. He realizes his own power and also the fact that he can buy practically anything. For him, Jesus is just another insignificant man who happened to find himself in a position of a celebrity by questioning the values of the society.

Herod manages to undermine people's perception of Christ by using tricks during his show. First time, while singing "change my water into wine" he grabs a bottle with clear liquid, shakes it and it turns red. Second time, when he sings "Prove to me that you're no fool, walk across my swimming", the screen over the stage shows Herod walking on water – a shot that clearly has been modified by modern technology. He wants to prove the point that his influence reaches much further than Christ might think.

After Jesus' "unsuccessful attempt" to prove he is not a fraud the responsibility to decide his case is returned to Pilate who is not too happy about it. He does not take Christ for his own enemy. Jesus has never confirmed that he considers himself to be "the King of the Jews".

What both the 1973 movie and the arena tour production have in common is the way Pilate responds to the yelling crowd. He appears to be genuinely surprised by the harsh reactions of the people and does not understand why they want him to be crucified. Compared to the original LP album from 1970, both in the 1973 and 2012 productions Pilate was given several important lines that explain his point of view. He reacts to the crowd's invocations of Caesar's name: "Well, this is new! Respect for Caesar! Till now this has been noticeably lacking! Who is this Jesus? Why is he different? You Jews produce messiahs by the sackful!" and "Behold the man! Behold your shattered king! You hypocrites! You hate us more than him!" From these additional verses, it is even more evident that Pilate does not wish to kill Christ and finds him harmless.

Nevertheless, the crowd is just a typical crowd and the story of *Jesus Christ Superstar* demonstrates how easily people can change their opinion on a famous person. For some reason, Jesus has been given a status of celebrity – admiring him is a matter of

fashion more than real faith. It does not take much for the crowd to switch from love to hatred.

In the 2012 arena tour, Christ's crucifixion is linked with Judas' show-off number *Superstar.* As a result, the torturing becomes a social event, with Judas sarcastically singing his part surrounded by a group of female dancers dressed in provocative angel costumes. However, the celebratory mood is soon replaced by Christ's former enemies/newborn admirers mourning at the tribute wall. Jesus eventually turns into a star again; after his tragic death the masses show their two-faced, hypocritical nature by making him a saint. Once more, the audience is given an example of how much harm media can do to individual.

On the whole, the 2012 arena tour production appears to be much more focused on the social issues of our time. Unlike the 1973 movie *Jesus Christ Superstar,* this incarnation has almost completely abandoned the traditional biblical version and makes no attempts to look authentic. Pontius Pilate has been transformed into a modern politician of the Western world, his soldiers have become police forces in riot gear. The Jewish priests do not act on behalf of the Church anymore; they have turned into mysterious men in suits representing an unspecified community with an enormous influence. Herod as a media mogul affects people's thinking through their television screens.

In the world which is under constant media scrutiny and ruled by corporations and politicians, a single individual has become an unimportant microscopic part of the unstoppable mechanism.

3.2.3 The first Czech production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Jesus Christ Superstar holds a prominent place in the Czech cultural life. It premiered at the Spirála Theatre in Prague on the 22nd of July 1994. After 47 months and 1288 performances, became the country's longest-running rock opera/musical. There has arguably not been a Western musical or a rock opera introduced to the Czech theatre scene with a greater success than Lloyd's and Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

The description of this version of the rock opera requires a deeper analysis of the process of staging and the events that preceded it. The situation in the Czech Republic in the early 1990s largely affected the production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Both of the productions mentioned in the previous chapters (Norman Jewison's 1973 film adaptation and the *Jesus Christ Superstar* – UK Arena Tour 2012) came into existence in the Anglo-American world, the world with a rich tradition of musical theatre, particularly Broadway and West End. These solid roots, together with sufficient funds, enabled the creators to experiment with new ideas. The dominant feature of them both is the fact that they responded strongly to the current events of their own time. Thus, "up-to-dateness" has become the crucial aspect of these two productions.

While the British or the American theatres could offer a high quality shows based on longstanding tradition, the Czech musical theatre had a long way ahead to catch up with the Western countries.

When *Jesus Christ Superstar* was introduced in 1994, the tradition of the Czech musical theatre was just starting. Apart from classical musicals occasionally performed at repertory theatres, the only famous musical that the Czech audience had gotten a chance to see was *Les Misérables* introduced in Prague in 1992.[48] However, it was the

[48] Nevertheless, even this production did not last long; it had to be closed after only free months as the theatre rental period had expired.

Czech production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* that triggered the rage for musical in the mid-1990s.[49]

Although the rock opera had never been staged in the Czech Republic before, it already had a remarkable fan base. As Michael Prostějovský, the translator of the libretto, remembers the whole generation grew up on the original LP from 1970 (Kumstýřová, Žmolík). The problem was that *Jesus Christ Superstar* was a product of the Western culture and, in addition to that, it dealt with a religious topic. The attitude of the Communist party towards religion was utterly hostile; throughout its existence, the Communist regime was applying repressive policy against the Church (Vlček 420).

These two facts became good enough reasons for the Czechoslovakian communist government to ban Jewison's 1973 movie in the country. Only after the Velvet Revolution did the citizens of Czechoslovakia get a chance to see the movie. The original 1970 album was also not available in Czechoslovakia during the Communist regime. Nevertheless, the seepage occurred, most often through Western contact; the recordings would be imported from Germany or other Western European countries.

In spite of these circumstances, most of the middle-aged generation and, possibly, their children under their parents' influence, were familiar with the rock opera. What Novotný and his friends were afraid of was the fact that the religious topic might drive people away. Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* that deals with Christ's story in a very similar way had received a cold response from the Czech audience. As Petr Novotný, the director of the Czech reincarnation, admits, for the most part, the Czech nation is atheistic and, for that reason, its reaction to the rock opera's topic was questionable (Nešlehová).

[49] The original intention was to produce Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats*. The plan had to be changed when, after almost a year of negotiations, the representatives of the English production announced their decision to organize a European tour of *Cats*. Authorizing productions in Central Europe at the time of the tour did not appear to be reasonable (Nešlehová).

The future of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on the Czech stages was completely uncertain. Nobody was able to foretell whether the forthcoming production would be successful or not. As a result, the success of the production struck everybody by surprise, including the producers themselves. However, there are a few factors that contributed greatly to benefit of the production.

As mentioned above, many Czech people had known the rock opera for over two decades. It is only natural to believe that, for a lot of people from one whole generation, *Jesus Christ Superstar* might have been shrouded in nostalgia, reminding the listeners of the old times. Although, like anywhere else in the world, *Jesus Christ Superstar* is often perceived as a musical rather than a rock opera in the Czech Republic, Webber managed to put rock music efficiently in a theatrical context. In the 1970s and 1980s rock music represented one of the strongest vehicles of youth rebellion and resistance against Communist regime in the country. Being a product of the Western, *Jesus Christ Superstar* remained banned from public life until the Velvet Revolution in 1989. After the fall of the Iron Curtain the social situation in Czechoslovakia and, subsequently in the Czech Republic, changed considerably. The rock opera ceased being perceived as a part of underground culture and finally got a chance to make its debut on the Czech theatre stages.

Moreover, the Czech fans were finally provided with lyrics in their native language. Possibly, the most important factor that made the production attractive for the Czech audience was the libretto. There were people in the country who had been waiting for the translation of the text for twenty years. This assumption is intensified by the fact that the knowledge of the English language among Czech people in the 1990s was still on a rather low level. Michal Prostějovský provided an equimetrical translation of the libretto, not a word by word translation. As a result, the sentences do not seem to

be as straightforward as in the English version. On the other hand, compared to the original, the lyrics of the songs turned out to be more poetic without losing the direct connection to Rice's text of the rock opera. Needless to mention, the Czech Judas or Jesus Christ could have never heard the whole auditorium singing along if the text had not been translated into the Czech language.

The fall of the ideological barrier heralded new values in Czech culture. One of the main tendencies of the early 1990s appears to be the determination to liberate the country from the Russian influence and to leave behind the communist past. The Czech nation felt ready to be fully integrated into Europe. In addition to that, the American influence gradually became one of the dominant factors in the development of Czech modern lifestyle and culture.

The effort to draw level with the Western culture can be clearly seen in the way the Czech production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* came into existence. At the time of the rock opera's premiere in Prague, the Czech producers had to do about twenty years of catching up. Thus, their main goal was arguably to fill out the two-decades-long gap between the time when *Jesus Christ Superstar* had been written and its Czech premiere in 1994. Norman Jewison's 1973 film became a fundamental inspiration for Petr Novotný and his coworkers. There are no obvious references to the contemporary life in the post-communist Czech Republic. On the other hand, the link between the movie and the Czech version cannot be denied, especially in the case of the costumes.

Due to the lack of finances, Jesus Christ and his disciples were dressed in simple robes, presumably naturally dyed, and stylized according to the romanticized idea of the biblical tradition. Gita Marcolová, the costume designer of the production, did not forget to add elements that would help define the characters of the rock opera.

The costumes of Pontius Pilate and his soldiers were a simplified version of the classic historical clothing typical of the Roman leader and his soldiers.

There are three cases when the outfits most likely had been inspired by Jewison's movie: the costumes of the Jewish priests represented a fairly faithful copy of the "priests on the scaffolding"; apart from the long black and white robes, their costumes included metal square breastplates and big black caps covering their heads.

Inspiration by the Jewison's film can also be easily noticed in the case of King Herod and his company. Marcolová chose to dress Herod in a long golden robe covering his back, leather loincloth and sandals. Thus, similarly to Josh Mostel in the movie, Vilém Čok would sing his Charleston half-naked with his round tummy sticking out, accompanied by dancers looking and acting like circus performers.

The only scene with an actual reference to the modern culture is the song *Superstar*. During this scene the female dancers in glittery white outfits with long pagoda sleeves resembling angel wings perform on the stage while Judas gives his post mortem appearance singing from the balcony. Again, influence of the 1973 film is quite obvious.

From the description above it is evident that the Czech production was not meant to be relevant to the present day. Simply put, the only references we can talk about are the references to Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

The producers also decided to follow the Anglo-American formula in casting the main roles. Inspired by foreign productions, Novotný chose to cast well-established Czech rock stars: Kamil Střihavka was cast as Jesus Christ, Bára Basiková would become Mary Magdalene. Originally hired to play the role of Jesus Christ, Dan Bárta eventually became famous mainly for his portrayal of Judas Iscariot. Vilém Čok was chosen to perform the role of King Herod and, last but not least, Aleš Brichta would

become the first Czech Caiaphas. Hiring famous rock stars turned out to be a wise decision; even today, twenty years later, these names remain the most popular cast of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

For the singers, accepting the offer to perform in the Spirála theatre meant a serious commitment. Novotný with his coworkers planned to stage the rock opera for a set run as long as it would be possible. This approach is rather unusual in the Czech theatrical environment. In addition to that, the primary target of the production was going to be the domestic audience and, as we know, the population of the Czech Republic is only around 10 million people (Nešlehová). Although this type of staging is quite common in Western countries, it is rather rare in the world of the Czech theatre. As the music critic Jiří Černý said, most big musicals in Prague survive only a few months. "In a city with a population of 1.2 million, these musicals face problems sustaining audiences in large theatres for long enough for them to recoup their investment" (Caris). Running a rock opera or a musical every day for almost four years is quite a unique achievement in the field of Czech theatre.

One of the toughest tasks that needed to be accomplished was to find the right space where the rock opera could be staged. Luckily, Novotný and his friends discovered a very original building in Prague's suburb area Holešovice that could serve the purpose.

The shape of the Spirála Theatre was radically different from the other Prague theatres at the time and even today. This massive black building was characterized by a cylindrical shape and a circular ground plan. Thus, the auditorium had been constructed in a way when every viewer, with the exception of those on the ground floor, was seated in the first row, looking down on the stage. It also enabled a direct contact between the actors and the audience sitting around the stage. The overall capacity of the theatre was

only 864 visitors. With all that said, the space of the building could provide a very unifying, intimate atmosphere.

In order to increase the level of the rock opera performances at the Spirála theatre, one more significant adjustment had to be carried out. Yet again, the producers took inspiration from the West, more concretely from London's West End. Jozef Celner, the Slovakian lighting designer who had working experience in London, designed the light park according to the British tradition, having the whole system imported from England. As he admitted in the interview, in the early 1990s the level of the technical equipment used in Czech theatres could be compared to the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Panenka 29). We can presume that Celner's effort to improve the technical side of the production contributed to the advancement in technical equipment in Czech theatres in general.

This chapter has pointed out the significance of the Czech production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* for the Czech modern culture. Unlike the previous two reincarnations of the rock opera, it did not contain any direct references to the contemporary social situation in the post-communist Czech Republic. Its "up-to-dateness" lies in the fact that its creators tried to bring the Czech cultural life closer to the West by bravely introducing a production of the famous rock opera without long-lasting tradition of the genre in the country. By doing so, they managed to arouse interest of the Czech audiences in musicals and this "musical fever" still lasts. However, until today, *Jesus Christ Superstar* remains the music theatre production in the Czech Republic with the highest number of shows continuously performed at one theatre venue.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the way the role of *Jesus Christ Superstar* has evolved throughout the decades, along with how its basic plot and storyline can overcome the factors of generation, time, and geographic region and be molded to whatever the producers at the time think relevant to their audience.

The results have demonstrated that the concept of this rock opera can be conceived as highly inspired by the biblical tradition or it can project itself into a vast variety of current economic, political or social situations.

The focus of the analysis was placed on three reincarnations of *Jesus Christ Superstar*; the first film adaptation from 1973 created by Norman Jewison, the newest British production *Jesus Christ Superstar – Arena Tour 2012* directed by Laurence Connor and the first Czech adaptation of *Jesus Christ Superstar* produced in 1994.

Jewison's movie is characterized by a large number of references to the contemporary American society. The director used the rock opera as a tool to portray the dominant aspects of his own time and place. His usage of military clothes as costumes for the Roman soldiers and the appearance of jets and tanks in the movie are a direct allusion to the Vietnam War that was still a current issue in 1972. The outfits of other characters in the story, e.g. Christ's disciples and the community around King Herod, represent a direct connection to the fashion tendencies of the counterculture movements in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s. The lifestyle chosen by Jesus and his followers indicates a close association with the hippie communes of the 1970s.

Laurence Connor introduced a production that cut out the link between Rice's and Webber's story and religious tradition altogether. The show's main purpose is to point out consumerism typical of the 21st century Western societies and brainwashing caused by media. Authorities are represented by politicians, a media mogul and a

secretive group of powerful businessmen. Jesus and his followers have been portrayed as a group of young rebels fighting the official repressive forces with a vision of better life with more freedom.

In comparison with the previous two productions, the possibilities of the Czech reincarnation were rather limited. Because of the lack of funds and a very short tradition of musical theatre in the country, the producers had to establish a completely new mindset and style of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. With the openness of interpretation for their brand new audience, the producers came up with a new and equally unique version that blended a general biblical portrayal of character costume with modern styles of music. The significance of this production also lies in the fact that it had the power to redefine the position of a country in the field of world culture and it changed its course of cultural development.

Jesus Christ Superstar is the perfect modern example of how a libretto made in the 1970s can become timeless. With few changes throughout multiple productions around the globe, the pieces of music have served the purpose of these productions to adapt to so many differing cultural phenomena.

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Resume

This diploma thesis deals with the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* originally written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice in 1969. The thesis is divided in three parts.

The first section attempts to define the specifics of rock opera in general and to characterize the differences between 'rock opera' and 'rock musical'.

The second section presents a short history of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the crucial aspects that both provoked controversy and won admiration of the young generation of people in the 1970s.

The third section analyzes three incarnations of *Jesus Christ Superstar* – Norman Jewison's 1973 movie, the video recording of the *Jesus Christ Superstar* - 2012 Live Arena Tour in the United Kingdom directed by Laurence Connor and the first official Czech production of the rock opera in 1994.

Each of these three versions represents a cultural phenomenon that, for one reason or another, responded to the needs of its time and generation.

The aim of this diploma thesis is to describe the approaches towards *Jesus Christ Superstar* that have been chosen by the producers in order to make the rock opera appealing to a particular audience.

Resumé

Předkládaná diplomová práce se zabývá rokovou operou *Jesus Christ Superstar*, kterou v roce 1969 napsali Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Tato práce je rozdělena do tří částí.

První část definuje specifika rokové opera ve všeobecnosti a charakterizuje rozdíly mezi výrazy „rocková opera“ a „rockový muzikál.“

Druhá část uvádí krátkou historii *Jesus Christ Superstar* a klíčové aspekty, které vyvolaly kontroverzi, ale také získaly obdiv mladé generace lidí 70. let.

Třetí část analyzuje tři verze rock opery *Jesus Christ Superstar* – film Normana Jewisona z roku 1973, videovou nahrávku *Jesus Christ Superstar – Live Arena Tour 2012* ve Velké Británii režírovanou Laurencem Connor a první oficiální českou produkci této rocké opery v roce 1994.

Každá z těchto verzí představuje kulturní fenomén, který z různých důvodu reagovaly na potřeby své doby a své generace.

Cílem této diplomové práce je popsat postoje k *Jesus Christ Superstar*, které producenti zvolili, aby učinili tuto rockovou operu zajímavou pro konkrétní publikum.