

'Superstar' on Broadway: Protests, Yawns, 1 Rave

New York — (RNS) — After months of fanfare, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," the rock opera, opened on Broadway amid protest and some praise and yawns from several major critics.

The stage production, compared in size and lavishness to the biggest on Broadway, followed massive commercial success of the music, which to date has sold 2.6 million albums.

A cast of 40 works on multi-level stages that go up and down on hydraulic lifts. Stars twinkle over Gethsemane and Jesus is hung on a cross.

While some ticket buyers to previews and the first night were awed by elaborate technical devices, The New York Times drama critic Clive Barnes found the total effect "brilliant but cheap — like the Christmas decorations of a chic Fifth Avenue store."

Barnes liked certain songs and performances but on the

whole found the musical "less than super."

New York Post critic Richard Watts said "Superstar" is "flat, pallid and actually pointless."

The New York Daily News said in a front page quip that "nobody liked it very much except the audience." However, the News critic, Douglas Watts, was most laudatory, using such adjectives as "triumph," "marvelous" and "magnificent." He said the show is done with "complete reverence."

Statements from two Jewish organizations, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee, had voiced concern that "Superstar" might have a negative impact on Christian-Jewish relations. The Jewish Committee's assessment claimed that the show places too much responsibility for the "suffering and crucifixion" of Jesus on Jewish priests. No accusations of anti-Semitism were made.

Outside the Mark Hellinger Theatre, two Christian groups picketed. Protesters from the Calvary Baptist church, a "Jesus People center," and from Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic Action in Queens scored what they saw as too much emphasis on the humanity of Jesus and too little stress on divinity in "Superstar." They also objected to the portrayal of Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene.

The two groups joined forces in picketing. Slogans on placards included: "We are One in the Lord" and "Mary Said He Is My Lord — Not My Lover." They chanted, "Down with 'Superstar,' Up with Jesus."

Watts of the Post wrote that the musical "wasn't worthy of the furor, enthusiasm and ire that it has aroused." He said he believed the authors were earnest and had no intention of being "frivolous or satirical and certainly didn't intend to be sacrilegious."

Mr. Barnes of the the Times summed up his reactions: "For me, the real disappointment came not in the music — which is better than run-of-the-mill Broadway and the best score for an English musical in years — but in the conception. There is a coyness in its contemporaneity, a sneaky pleasure in the boldness of its anachronisms, a special, undefined air of smugness in its daring. Christ is updated, but hardly, I felt, renewed."



Goodbye

Dismissed because of continued strike activities in Daly City, Calif., teacher Barbara Davis tells a weeping student why she must leave the school. More than 225 teachers involved in the strike were dismissed.

Cardinal Mindszenty Saluted by Magazine

Chicago — (RNS)—Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty made "the bravest choice of all" when he agreed to leave the U.S. embassy in Budapest and go to Rome after 15 years as an exile in his own land, said the Christian Century, an ecumenical weekly published here.

Noting that the Hungarian government referred to the 79-year-old prelate as "cardinal" when he left the country, but would not recognize him as "Primate of Hungary," the Century commented:

"These word games, so essential to political compromises, should not conceal the fact that this very brave and lonely man has now made perhaps the bravest choice of all: to overcome his own pride if it will ease the lot of his Church and his people."

Recalling Cardinal Mindszenty's long battle against Nazism and communism, his 1948 arrest, 40 days of trial, seven years of house arrest, and a few days of freedom during the 1956 Hungarian revolt, the Century noted that when the 1956 rebellion collapsed, the cardinal observed, "I have no hate for anybody."

"It was the line of least resistance for Cold Warriors and political reactionaries in the West to affect a monopoly on Cardinal Mindszenty as a Christian anti-Communist hate symbol," the Century said. " . . . That sentiment," it said, "is reflected in a New York Daily News editorial — 'The cardinal should have a tale to tell, of Red barbarism, tyranny and hate that should re-alert the free world to this menace

to all human liberty and decency.'"

"We're not sure what tale he will tell," the Century concluded, "but we suspect that he is still capable of saying, 'I have no hate for anybody.'"

Immigration Seen Antidote to Dipping U.S. Birth Rate

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — A Roman Catholic official handling migration and refugee affairs told a special government commission on population growth here that a continued increase in population is "vital" to a country wishing to remain viable and productive.

Donald G. Hohl, assistant director of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Division for Migration and Refugee Services, said that with the U.S. declining birth rate "the vitality through growth will diminish." He noted that future immigration may be the "salvation" of the nation's growth pattern.

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