

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD  
SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2025/2026

**“Jesus Christ Superstar”**

Witham Amateur Operatic Society

Directed by Jimmy Hooper

Adjudicated by Rebecca Clemens, assisted by Sarah White

Thursday 23rd April 2026

Front of House / Programme

We are always welcomed so warmly into the theatre by the front of house team at WAOS. We were guided to our seats and offered a complimentary drink for the interval.

The programme was well presented, with helpful song-by-song information, full cast headshots, and lovely rehearsal photos.

Set, Stage Management, & Props

The main structure of the stage consisted of a rostrum with stairs on either side, with a 90's style graffiti backdrop featuring the tag “Jesus.” Along with the scaffolding, this effectively established the contemporary tone of the production.

The stage was used effectively throughout, with the stairs providing strong levels and visual interest. The set design minimised the need for scene changes, maintaining pace and continuity. Blocks and planks were introduced for “The Last Supper”, which created a smooth and effective transition into the scene.

There were some lovely props used during the show, including hand held cam-corders, palm leaves, protest banners, a gold chest that opened automatically during “Blood Money”, and lanterns, all of which added texture and detail to the performance.

Wardrobe / Hair / Makeup

The modern setting was reflected in the costume choices, with a mix of styles. The chorus wore cream and beige linen, creating a neutral base. Jesus wore white, Mary in red, and Judas in black leather, all of which followed familiar visual conventions.

Judas' transformation during “Jesus Christ Superstar” into a silver sequin outfit was striking, and this was complemented by the dancers' grey flapper dresses, although the colour of the grey dresses seemed to get lost in the scene. King Herod's boxing costume, influenced by Sir Elton John, complete with oversized glasses and a perm wig, was a bold and entertaining interpretation.

Further distinction in chorus costumes during the temple and arrest scenes would have helped clarify their roles and locations.

### Sound & Lighting

Overall, the sound quality was good, with a well-balanced band and clear vocal amplification. As the vocals of the cast were strong, there were times that the sound was over amplified and the volume became uncomfortable at times. In comparison, additional microphone support may have helped to improve clarity and diction of some of the priests.

Lighting was vibrant and effective, with strong use of colour throughout. Notable moments included the bright white light surrounding Jesus in the overture, the use of red tones for Caiaphas and the priests, and a dynamic swirling effect. There were some delays with the positioning of the spotlight, and a few scenes were underlit, of note in “Jesus Christ Superstar,” where increased lighting on the ensemble would have improved focus. The red light during Judas’ suicide was striking and well timed.

### Direction

The show maintained a strong pace, which was supported by its sung through structure. The modern interpretation felt fresh and engaging.

“Heaven on Their Minds” set the tone of the show perfectly, with a constant flow of movement onstage, with armography and lyrical movement to illustrate the lyrics. The cast maintained excellent sightlines, and the use of staging, particularly the stairs, enhanced visibility and composition.

Characterisation among the leads was well established. Mary was portrayed with strength, though additional variation in emotional depth during her solos could have added further dimension to the character. King Herod’s interpretation was an interesting choice, creating a fun twist on the scene, the overall message coming through clearly in the boxing ring. “Could We Start Again Please” could have benefited from more interaction between Mary and Peter to strengthen their emotional connection.

During Act 1, we noticed the omission of Judas in scenes from Hosanna to The Temple. This unfortunately weakens his point to Caiaphas in “Damned for All Time” where he says “I’m the one who saw, Jesus can’t control it like he did before”. You may have wished to consider setting Judas patrolling the rostrum throughout these songs; looking down at Jesus, sinisterly monitoring his every move.

The chorus was used very effectively throughout the show, clearly reflecting the shifting public opinion throughout the story. Some additional staging or costumes may have helped to secure the location and the chorus’ identity in a few scenes.

The setting of Judas’ death was strong, with effective use of red lighting. The trial scene was impactful, with an effective use of red paint which was particularly powerful. The tapping of the nails during the Crucifixion, made by hitting the metal scaffolding, was a really chilling moment!

The title song “Jesus Christ Superstar” felt visually overcrowded, which unfortunately distracted from Judas. Reducing the numbers on stage would have helped to simplify the scene, and allow the Divas more opportunity to shine.

The choice to close the curtains slowly was a beautiful, poignant moment.

Well done on this beautiful production.

### Musical Direction

The orchestra, under the direction of Jessie Tabor, produced a strong and consistent sound. At times, some instrumental lines lacked clarity within the overall texture of the score. A false entry occurred during “Heaven on Their Minds,” but the performance quickly recovered.

Principal vocals were exceptional—powerful and well-controlled. The chorus handled challenging sections, such as “The Temple,” very well, although there were minor pitching issues noted at times.

### Thomas Pleasant - ‘Jesus’

Tom delivered a compelling performance as Jesus with commanding stage presence. He has a beautiful warm vocal tone, and his use of falsetto demonstrated impressive vocal versatility. An additional touch of nasal/chest mix would have helped propel lines such as “Get out!” to the next level.

Tom’s “Gethsemane” was a show stopping moment, my personal highlight of the show. Congratulations on this impressive performance.

### Michael Bardo - ‘Judas’

Michael brought a powerful rock vocal and strong emotional connection to the role. He is able to portray such character and emotion through his singing.

I would have liked to see a *bit more* purpose in movement and physicality - all the way to the finger tips and tips of the toes. Some additional variation in tone in “Damned for all time”, demonstrating a greater internal monologue, would have enhanced this performance further.

Congratulations on this accomplished performance.

### Leanne Barber - ‘Mary’

Leanne’s bright, clear and lyrical voice complemented the lead male voices. She communicated the narrative effectively through her singing. We would have liked to see a bit more emotional contrast at the start of “I Don’t Know How to Love Him” i.e. inward contemplation/turmoil, therefore creating some light and shade ahead of the impressive climax that Leanne sang so effortlessly.

A confident and engaging portrayal. Congratulations.

### Michael Mundell-Poole - 'King Herod'

This was an entertaining interpretation of King Herod. The combination of singing and physicality worked well—though even more flamboyance could have been explored.

### Tim Clarke - 'Pilate'

Tim has a very warm and inviting tone of voice, this was particularly enjoyable during “Pilates Dream”, which was rather mesmerising. Tim demonstrated a good level of authority over Jesus, although I would have liked a variety in tone during the lashes.

### Stewart Adkins - 'Caiaphas'

Stewart has a rich tone with an impressive range, reaching his lower register with ease. Stewart’s diction was excellent, especially considering the range. Stewart had a strong stage presence.

Well done on this convincing performance.

### Simon Possee - 'Annas'

Simon has a very confident voice and presence on stage, perfectly matching Stewart as Caiaphas.

### Jason Norton - 'Simon'

Jason had a good stage presence, and sang his song with zeal! There were unfortunately some issues with tuning as the vocal line was lost towards the end of the song, and don’t be afraid to shorten some notes to help give some meaning to the phrase.

### Ben Rolph - 'Peter'

Ben has a lovely voice, and sang his lines confidently. The tuning was not perfect when singing the duet with ‘Mary’, but this was resolved on the repeat.

### Chorus

In JCS, the ensemble plays a much more active and symbolic role than in many traditional musicals. It isn’t just background support; it functions almost like a character in its own right, shaping how the story feels and unfolds.

To this effect, the chorus were used excellently, with the use of lyrical dance to emphasise the lyrics, and reinforcing the narrative. They brought energy to the stage, providing a lot of visual stimulus. The ensemble enhanced the final crucifixion scene with their organic and sincere reactions.

### Summary

This was a very powerful piece of theatre, exhibiting some exceptional vocals and local talent. The chorus were a key part of this show, and together with the modern staging, costumes, and props, enhanced the overall performance.