

Jesus Christ Superstar

Oh, the joy of Minack. The gasps of delight as newcomers took in the magnificent cliff side theatre and the vast panorama of sea towards Logan's Rock. The renewed pleasure of long time devotees who had been looking forward to another week of Cornish sunshine but not to the ninety seven uneven steps from shop and museum down to the stage.

It took two hours for the Get In human chain to unload the contents of two lorries down the descending levels of seating on the Saturday morning. Acres of wood, scaffolding, tarpaulins, costumes, props, 3,500 screws and 350 coach bolts, and the all important refreshments. The mechanical miracle of the cross, designed and made by Martin Beatty, was handled with reverence. It became, over the week, the true cross; Bruce could sell relics.

Tea and coffee immediately went into production, a non-stop stream of liquid to fifty cast, twelve musicians, eleven stage crew, four props, three lighting, two wardrobe, one sound man and a chap-er-one. The numbers grew daily through immaculate conception.

As the set builders got to work reassembling the giant jig-saw building on which the cross would rise, Neil Reynolds, director, and Fran Newitt, choreographer, reassembled the show using the new levels of the Minack stage and the many exits and entrances, every one up and down more steep and narrow steps.

The dress rehearsal began on Sunday afternoon in a thick sea mist. It grew into a relentless mizzle. Everyone got wet. The rain set in and the evening performance for the Minack Trustees was in question. But the Barnstormer company's enthusiasm (Richard Allen is Mr Barnstormer) gave it the go ahead.

The upper dressing room began to look like a refugee camp. There are only twelve mirrors. If you were lucky you got a mirror, a shelf and a chair. Others only got a shelf. Many only got a chair. The dance captain only got the floor. Corin did her make-up sitting cross-legged on the floor.

It rained all evening. The Trustees sat wrapped in waterproofs, crouched under umbrellas. Cast changed behind rocks out of wet costumes into more wet costumes. Jesus came off stage, drenched to the skin, shivering with cold. Everyone deserved a medal. Tricia Whyte, wardrobe mistress, had a day's work ahead with the tumble drier. And another on Tuesday.

The first public performance on Monday evening was even worse. As Malcolm Le Croisette, stage manager, said: "It was raining horizontal stair-rods". The wind blew in swathes of Atlantic rain. No one escaped, yet the audience stayed, mesmerised by a spectacular production.

Jesus came off, was wrapped immediately in a blanket, almost incoherent with cold, imminent hypothermia, soaked and shaking. A heated towel was ready in the dressing room, warm foot bath, cup of tea. Foot massage to bring back circulation. He was precious. He was our top G.

And Act II was the reason. Television and newspaper reports have made us almost immune to man's cruelty to humanity. But we witnessed, every performance, the barbarism of three hefty muscled guards beating up Jesus in slow motion. Then the thirty-nine lashes from the mob, searing lines of blood lacerating his bare skin, his body contorted in pain with each vicious lash.

Climbing the steps to his death, carrying the cross on his back, the night sky was already in mourning. The cross rose and Jesus hung in space, his hands hammered. With his last faltering words, there came a tremendous crescendo of discordant chords that seemed to rent apart the heavens. One almost expected the sky to open.

His figure went dark and in the same instant the crucifixion and his torn body were silhouetted and edged in a blinding white light. The audience were stunned into silence. No one moved. No one breathed. It was a moment that no one could ever forget.



But Minack was not all death and suffering. The weather improved. Two fifteen-foot basking sharks liked the ultrasound pulses and came to listen again and again. Nightly the cast and others de-camped to the Cable & Wireless Inn for revitalization, Karaoke, fun. The fancy dress Heaven and Hell produced amazing costumes.

The parties often went on until four in the morning, a few stayed up to watch the dawn from the beach. They may have seen the Porthcurno ghost ship coming out of the mist, a black square-rigged vessel, rising from the sea and moving across the sand without pitch or quiver, moving stealthily over dry land up the road till she vanishes into a smoky wreath higher up the valley.

Whether they saw the ghost ship or not, Jesus Christ Superstar and the Minack Theatre is a memory to last.

Stella Thomas

Green Room Theatre

The Green Room Theatre Company, under the direction of local actress Shirley Robbins, is delighted to be bringing the company to the Barn Theatre in September for the first time.

The production of *Where There's a Will.....There's a Play* will be on Saturday 18 September. It is, of course, about Shakespeare, and is an Elizabethan romp, with music in the traditions of "Shakespeare in Love". It includes local musicians and some winning members of Heathfield Drama Club, from the Drama Festival earlier in the year, plus professional members of Shirley's Green Room Theatre Company. Box office 01342 870526 or www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk