

## 'Superstar' musically lacking

Review By Greg Lukow

Cecil B. DeMille would have been amazed to say the least. *Jesus Christ Superstar* is the latest extension of the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice. And the Passion Play on film has come a long way since Cecil dabbled with the story so many years ago.

Pouring out of a bus in the middle of the desert, the hippie Jesus and his youthful band of followers begin to unload a hodgepodge of Biblical props and contemporary gimmicks. Director Norman Jewison, who also directed (*Fiddler on the Roof*), then turns them loose and like high-schoolers making home movies, they romp recklessly through the opera with a limitless enthusiasm. It must have been the easiest thing Jewison has ever directed.

Tanks and jet planes chasing a black

Judas across the desert, postcards and pot being sold at a temple bazaar, and King Herod's marvelously clever ragtime routine (featuring Joshua Monstel, Zero's son) certainly add a new flair to the film but ultimately they become a cop-out. While adding visual interest, they contribute little to a story with far greater substance. In the end, I believe they have detracted from the only intelligent and meaningful elements on the film—the words and music of Rice and Weber.

Listening to the original recording of the opera, one got a feeling of the emotions and strains on the characters. By stripping away the myth from the man, and making Christ an adored, misunderstood and unobtainable superstar, Rice's lyrics were a challenging and thought-provoking work.

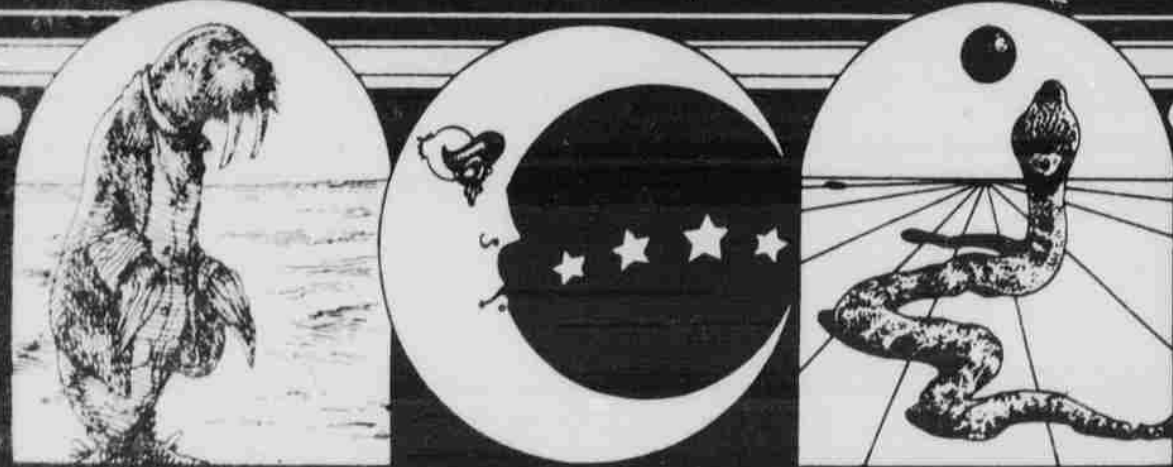
But unfortunately, too much of

this is lost in the film. Prancing Israeli longhairs just do not make it as disciples of Christ. Much of the grasping search for understanding between Christ and his followers is gone, even though Jewison has managed to maintain the puzzling relationship between Judas and Jesus, Jesus and Mary Magdalene and finally between Christ and Father.

But the sharp edge of the meaning behind *Superstar* has dulled in the three years since the opera was released. The film is an exciting visual addition to its fans. To those unfamiliar with it and who question its religious professions, it may ire you a bit, but I doubt very much if it will shake your spiritual foundations.

See it, enjoy it if you can, but don't give it any more thought than you did three years ago.

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