





Jesus Ride

New York International Fringe Festival

reviewed by **Melanie N. Lee**

Aug 20, 2009

The theme from *Jesus Christ Superstar* blares as the big screen flashes celluloid Jesuses—Max von Sydow, Jeffrey Hunter, Willem Dafoe, Jim Caviezel. Our solo storyteller, Michael Schlitt, enters, shouting, "Strap in, heathens! It's going to be a bumpy ride!" Welcome to *Jesus Ride*, directed by Nancy Keystone.

What follows is an amazing blend of several narratives: the history of film; the history of Jews in America; the history of Jesus and Christianity; and as the lynchpin, the story of Schlitt's stint as the post-production manager on the 1995 Jesus film, *The Revolutionary*.

The son of a TV writer and of a French Jew who escaped the Holocaust, Mike says that he didn't really think of himself as a Jew: "I'm nonpracticing. I'm Jew-ish." He encountered "something holy, something unseen" at age seven when his father took him to see *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Mike is hired by Sony Pictures' High Definition Center (whose equipment doesn't work). Awaiting his "big break", one day the script for *The Revolutionary*, to be produced by Paul and Jan Crouch of the Trinity Broadcasting Network, crosses Mike's desk. Not believing in God and knowing nothing about Jesus, Mike pours himself into research, reading the Gospels, and viewing 33 films about the Savior.

He views the original *The King of Kings* with H. B. Warner ("The definitive Jesus"), the second *King of Kings* with Jeffrey Hunter ("I was a teenage Jesus"), *Godspell* with Victor Garber ("Jesus with an Afro"), all the way up to director Mel Gibson's 2004 *The Passion of*

the Christ ("the bloodiest and the most lucrative").

The Revolutionary's crew includes a devout Christian, Rafael, the engineer, "the nicest guy...my HD Center personal Jesus", who has a cigarette habit. In contrast is Rob, the film's director, born-again, yet an abusive control freak; his Jewish assistant, Ed, is there, Mike says, to display all the negative stereotypes that Christians have of Jews.

"Rob and his Jew" attend the first production meeting; the film will be shot in Jerusalem and in **green screen**. Mike asks, "If we're doing it all in green screens, why are we shooting in Jerusalem?" Mike also corrects Rob when he calls him Mark. Alone in an elevator, Rob warns Mike, "Never contradict me in front of the others." Rob's abuses pile on during filming and in post-production. "What was this guy like before he was born again?" Mike wonders. Then Rob demands that Mike help him do something shady. Will Mike emulate the movie mythic heroes and defy evil?

Mike includes harsh words about Jewish-Christian relations: "Judaism becomes the shadow against which Christianity can be the light." He marvels how the movie industry, run by Jews, perpetuates anti-Semitic stereotypes in portraying Pharisees, while Jesus and his followers resemble Gentiles. He cringes at the sight of Charlton Heston, as Judah Ben-Hur, kissing a mezuzah.

Mike wonders if he's too cynical for his own good, yet he assures himself that God would prefer an "honest doubter" to a syncophant. Showing TV clips of the Crouches and of faith healer Benny Hinn, Mike marvels that such people would be considered God's messengers. But he asks, "What do I really believe in?"

Schlitt does an excellent job weaving together so many historical and narrative elements that are informative, amusing, and disturbing. My companion, my sister, declared him a genius.

By the way, you can learn more about *The Life of Jesus: the Revolutionary* at [imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). I can imagine what might happen if Rob, who is still directing films, ever finds out about Mike's show: "Jesus Ride: the Lawsuit."

Producer: Deux Ex Productions

Author: Mike Schlitt

Director: Nancy Keystone

Buy tickets for this show:

Sun August 16 7:45 pm

Thu August 20 7:45 pm

Sat August 22 5:00 pm

Sat August 22 9:45 pm

Tue August 25 7:45 pm

Sat August 29 3:15 pm

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