

Musical examines Jesus as God, man

Role brings Olympia native back to Capital Playhouse

By Molly Gilmore for The Olympian
Published March 19, 2009

Playing Jesus has its challenges, but Jamie Cooper, who is starring in Capital Playhouse's "Jesus Christ Superstar," is approaching the role as he would any other.

"It's a character who is so well-known across the world and who has had this impact deeply on countless billions of people," said Cooper, who grew up in Olympia and is pursuing an acting career in New York City. "It's an interesting process to explore a character who has that kind of history to him."

But even Jesus still is a character, Cooper said. "I'm approaching it as any other acting text. We go right to the script first. It just so happens that the script is based on a gospel."



The musical by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber helped put Capital Playhouse on the map during the theater's 1998-99 season. Cooper, who started out in the playhouse's Kids at Play program, was 13 then, and played Peter in that production. He also appeared as a member of the ensemble in a production at the University of Michigan, where he received a bachelor's degree.

Like the earlier playhouse production, the one opening tonight features mostly young actors.

"It's interesting to come back where I was a student and now be a professional guest artist and be with other students who are in training," Cooper said. "It's a treat to see that the playhouse is still going strong and to see the benefits that live theater has on the youth of this community."

The actor is working with many of the same people he worked with when he acted with Capital Playhouse and its Kids at Play program.

"It's poignant because I did the show so long ago with this theater in the same space with many of the same people working on the show," he said. "It's the same creative team - Jeff Kingsbury and Troy Arnold Fisher and the lighting designer and even some of the same musicians."

The play examines Jesus as both God and man.

"We are basically trying to tell the story of Christ as a man," Rice said in a Time magazine interview in 1970. "I think he increases in stature by looking at him as a man.

Cooper agrees. "He's a special man, but he is a human being. That's the distinct perspective we're trying to bring into this production and into this character. In the score, he believes he is the son of God, but I think he also believes that everybody is a child of God. He's trying to bring God closer to the people."