

Epic Passion Play in Trafalgar Square draws thousands

Ellen Teague | Apr 15th, 2022

A 100-strong cast returned to Trafalgar Square on Good Friday, after a two-year gap due to the Covid pandemic, for two live portrayals of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Disciples, Roman soldiers, along with Jesus riding a donkey and Pontius Pilate riding through the crowd on horseback, featured in a very ambitious and professional production that - judging by the chat - was watched by an audience across the world as well as around 20,000 in the Square. A beautiful sunny afternoon was laid on too!

I tuned in to a livestream on Facebook after a reminder from London Mayor Sadiq Khan on Twitter. He said: "For more than a decade, The Passion of Jesus has brought together people from all backgrounds with its lasting message of compassion and courage. It has been an inspiration and source of strength to millions."



Screenshot ICN/JS

The performance depicted the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans and then the Resurrection, at which point the crowd clapped and cheered. Before that some were drawn to the stage to choose between Barabbas and Jesus, and they joined in with gusto.

For actor James Burke-Dunsmore this was his final performance as Jesus after at least ten years in Trafalgar Square and two decades in other performances portraying the life of Christ. He has always reported being privileged to step into Jesus' shoes and to witness the power of the Crucifixion in front of thousands of people. This is after walking a way of the Cross going up and down steps around the Square. The three 'crucified' can see how the audience reacts to the suffering through the expressions on their faces, which he describes as "emotional". The connection with the audience is also demonstrated by the silence in the Square, despite passing buses, as the story is being told very movingly.

Wintershall, a theatre company based in the Surrey countryside, has been putting on their monumental play, The Passion of Jesus, in central London since 2010. Wintershall says the production is "a gift to Londoners and visitors." Peter Hutley founded the volunteer group in his home in 1989, initially producing performances inside an 18th century barn behind the house. I have been at a Christmas show here, where the barn became a very realistic stable of Bethlehem.