

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
9th New Plays Festival 1968

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Gospel Theme

by Charles Landstone

The enterprising Questors Theatre in Ealing have started their ninth annual New Play Festival, with a noteworthy first play by David Yallop, who has already had considerable experience as a writer for television.

In Search of a Man is the story of Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate. The Jews are the thorn in the Procurator's life. Generalisation about them is impossible; with their absurd religion and their pride, they never miss an opportunity to upset the Romans. The Zealots, on their side, the underground resistance movement, are determined to make life impossible for the conquerors.

In this there moves the figure of Jesus, and Mr. Yallop's aim is to refute the legend, which for 2,000 years has been an easy excuse for antisemitism. He is shown here as a tool of the Zealots, who, in order to unite the people against the Romans, invent the legend of the Messiah and fake the miracles which Jesus believes himself to have performed. At the end it is Pilate who arranges that the crowd shall demand Barabbas in preference to Jesus.

Mr. Yallop's characterisation is good, but he tends to lapse into prosaic lengthy argument which mars the restrained simplicity of the dialogue. It is, however, an interesting evening, with very good acting by Alan Robinson as Jesus and Nevile Cruttenden as the leading Zealot.

No objection

Surprisingly, the controversial aspects of the story featured hardly at all in the audience-participation discussion that followed the performance of "In Search of a Man."

No one objected to the portrayal of Jesus as a pawn of the Zealots, lacking Divine attributes; some of those taking part (mainly non-Jews) in fact felt that the Gospels had been clarified for them by Mr. Yallop's interpretation.

While describing it as "a fascinating play," Dannie Abse, who led the discussion, questioned whether Mr. Yallop's dialogue had the eloquence and grandeur he felt the theme demanded.