

Films: Lacombe Lucien (QFT, February 2-7)

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### JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR (St Anne's Cathedral)

Outside the Cathedral the Free Presbyterians demonstrated. They might be asked by a great Reformer: "Why should the Devil have all the good tunes?" There are indeed catchy melodies and how much praise must go to everyone on and off stage for energy and involvement! Candy Devine is superb as Mary Magdalene but all the rest match her; the lighting is effective and the musical direction by John Anderson is brilliant, fluent and precise. I'm not by nature keen on that mixture of big band, jazz, rock cross-lit by pastiche Debussy or Milhaud or whatever so my praise is a pleasant surprise to myself. Connoisseurs who have seen three and four productions were highly impressed by what *Actors Wilde* have achieved under Roy Heayberd's direction. Congratulations to them! And go and see it even at that price.

But have the objectors any point about *Superstar* itself? Well, there is nothing blasphemous about presenting the Passion story in drama or music in the contemporary idiom. The Miracle plays or the great Bach passions can testify to that. Of course the profound meditations of Bach, a man of faith in an age of general public belief, must be different from Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber writing in our sceptical times. For myself, the terrible understanding of Peter's denial in the St John Passion moves more than anything in *Superstar*: perhaps only those with faith really know what doubt and denial mean. Apparently there are objections to Judas in *Superstar*. I can't see anything wrong. St Matthew is the basic gospel used for the narrative and he makes the connexion between annoyance at the ointment which might have been sold to help the poor and the betrayal: he also (Chapter 26, Verse 24, my brothers) points up the paradox of Judas' free-will and his being the fated betrayer which *Superstar* stresses.

So far then, no blasphemy. Certainly we end with the crucifixion and little hint of the whole scope of cosmic history which frames the event in the Mystery Cycles or even the Resurrection. But our attention is on the Holy Week drama, so this is fair enough. No: what is worrying might be expressed as theological objection but is, in reality, a criticism of the script of *Superstar*. Just as each age will re-tell the story in its own way, so each age will recreate the image of Christ.

Think of the variety of Christs Crucified as we move in the visual arts from mediaeval times into the Renaissance or to Stanley Spencer's vision of the events in twentieth century England: or some African or Chinese Christ; or one who walks on the waters 'not of Genesaret, but Thames' in poetry; or the Pasolini film—the images are various in time and place. Christ can be triumphant, suffering, broken, mystic, ordinary and a thousand things; each partial artistic expressions of the complex figure in the Gospels and the variety of experiences of

Him in different countries and generations. But is there a place for an image as a pop-star? Is the appropriate contemporary image that of a fading, jaded, girning fellow, complaining about his friends and his hard work? St Mark stresses the Son of Man who is weary and friendless so Mary's song (repeated by Judas) seeing him as only a man and wondering what sort of love he ought to have is dramatically appropriate and acceptable in all ways. But this *Superstar* ends with a flatulent piece of humanistic mysticism in verse where Christ is the Universal Man elected by us and representing the World Soul in each of us—enigmatically entitled John Nineteen, Forty One (a verse on the empty tomb if the Bible is in fact in mind). The Narrator has been a preachy sort of fellow anyway, telling us we are all Judas and reading (beautifully) James Shirley's *The Glories of Our Blood and State*; but here his sermon is soft sentimentality. It is also *aesthetically* false. This Christ hasn't even a spark of energy in cleansing the Temple: he spends

his time moving from defeated lack of purpose into a complaining falsetto of agonized petulance. Personally I'd only elect him for quiet retirement to a country cottage or to the panel of one of the more mediocre television shows where his embarrassing self-pity could be left as a salutary reminder of human failings and the cruelty of the show-biz world. As a "Representative Man"—never! Perhaps art will always (as Blake says Milton found out) be on the side of the Devil. Even in the Bach Passions the obvious and easy drama comes in the hatred, in the cries of 'Crucify him!' In *Superstar* Mary Magdalene has some of the best tunes—so the Devil or Pitt Wilkinson's funny Herod doesn't get them all! But the part given to Christ makes the heart of the whole show hollow. But go and judge for yourselves—my doubts are not about Mark Scott or the performance, but ultimately about the *Jesus Christ Superstar* itself.

Brian Rothwell

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### LACOMBE LUCIEN (QFT, February 2-7)

Critics are divided over *Lacombe Lucien*, but I am almost certain it is, in its way, a great film. So near perfect, in fact, that I find it difficult to do more than describe and praise.

Those who know Louis Malle's earlier and more famous films, *Zazie dans le Metro* and *Viva Maria*, may be surprised to find that the comic high spirits which frequently led to mere slackness and confusion are lacking here. *Lacombe Lucien* is more reminiscent of Malle's 1957 thriller, *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, in its intriguingly objective treatment of an anti-hero fatally trapped by his own endeavour. The camera is like a wise, sad eye observing the folly and pettiness of the protagonist so that, though we can never grow to like him, his story speaks volumes about human nature. It's a philosophical detachment, as is implied by the opening quotation from the philosopher

organs and pianos

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George Santayana, to the effect that 'Those who forget the past must relive it'.

The past in this case is Vichy France, and Malle is remembering it in the story of Lucien Lacombe, a very young and unsophisticated country lad who, having failed to join the Maquis, finds an outlet for his youthful (and violent) energy in working for the Germans. Perhaps Malle's fairness in dealing with the sore problem of collaboration is borne out by the controversy his film caused in France. I can only say that everything about it was completely believable. Ophuls' mammoth TV documentary *La Chagrin et le Pitie*, which, incidentally, suggests that the nightmare of the occupation is still alive in France, does not alter my opinion.

Malle seems to have found a renewed sureness after a foray into documentary. His series of TV films, *Calcutta*, were not surpassed even by Antonioni's *Chung Kuo*, and we recently had the treat of seeing on BBC his very simple and powerful study of work in a Citroen car factory.

These seem to have led to his theory of 'cinema direct', a term he prefers to "cinema verite" partly because he applies it to conventional fiction as much as to documentary or improvisation. Certainly *Lacombe Lucien* convinces an audience in every particular that this is what really happens to people. It's quite an achievement, for example, to blend so imperceptibly such powerful and immediate performances as those of Pierre Blaise (Lucien), a purely instinctive performer, and Holget Lowenadler (if I have the name right), whose role as a vulnerable, proud Jew caught in a series of horrible dilemmas, requires and receives all the subtlety of an experienced professional actor.

I suppose what annoyed French people so much was that Malle is so convincing. Lucien, like most of us, isn't very thoughtful, and his response to ideology depends upon instinct more than anything. He would have joined the Maquis for the same reason that he turns to the Nazis: he wants some action and purpose in his boring life. His love for a Jewish girl leads him into all sorts of absurd moral situations, which to him are neither absurd nor moral, since the conflicting ideologies mean nothing to him.

The picture of occupied France built up with remarkable economy and restraint shows a maze of profound and, for ordinary people, insoluble moral problems. The audience, like

Lucien, is impressed by the difficulty of taking a clear stance towards what's happening. When Lucien hears the sounds of torture from upstairs in the police headquarters, he looks up only to see two pretty children romping down the stairs and a big, sappy dog lolloping about: weird, but true.

The general lessons about understanding (in every sense) should be obvious, but perhaps the film applies more specifically to us here and now. We are fortunate not to be forced into many difficult moral choices — as yet. But there are thousands of people in this country suffering from our failure to understand our past. I hope we won't have to wait, like the French, for thirty years and another Louis Malle before we can begin to exorcise this present evil and abandon the habit of reinventing history with the aid of hindsight.

Trying to explain the Irish to the English, Mary Holland once wrote that any people, given similar circumstances, would behave in a similar way. What matters is how people behave *now*, what the circumstances are *now*. Maybe we should worry more about altering circumstances than making moral harangues. Anyway, that's part of my reaction to this excellent film.

Robert Johnstone




It came to pass that in the bleak mid winter of 1976 a new Chamber Ensemble was born, and its name was called Galway, after the Ulster flautist of that name. And this Ensemble came to Ulster, to perform its wonders around the fortunate Province. And people came (shepherds amongst them no doubt) from far and wide to see this new baby. And if they didn't get a shock, then they should have done. Because Mr Galway and his Golden Flute is becoming something of a snare and a delusion, and his ensemble is in danger of bringing the word professionalism into bad odour. There might be mitigating circumstances: a rigorous schedule brought the group to Fisherwick Presbyterian Church last Friday after several concerts further afield, and there was no doubt a sense of end-of-the-week tiredness. But people don't

pay money to watch other people being tired (unfortunately), nor do they pay to be sent to sleep. It has to be said that, notwithstanding dozens of encores, this was not an auspicious start for this group, and if they hope to last they will have to pull up their socks.

A lot of the trouble had to do with sheer lackadaisical sloppiness: long gaps between movements, between items too, an interval of inexcusable length when there is neither bar nor urinal to console the thirsty and the incontinent (and what audience consists of any others). After the first movement of the first piece, Mr Galway decided his chair was inadequate, so we had much byplay whilst another was sought, and found, and tested. Before one item, an ambulance siren was heard, and the clever violin plucked his strings into tune. More serious trouble came when the group got down to playing music. Mr Galway announced that although the programme would be played in the order as announced, the first piece (a quartet by the forgotten Devienne) would be played backwards, and a set of variations would be played, not in the composer's order, but in an order decided by the group. Poor Devienne, because of his now wretched anonymity, had to suffer the strangulation of a piece he might once have been justly proud of, with its sensitive writing for flute and strings. The panache with which he had begun the opening was lost as this now became the last movement, with an interlude of chair- and radiator-moving thrown in for good measure, with a few laughs to keep everybody happy. As if that were not enough, there was total confusion in the theme and variations as everyone disagreed on repeats, much to the apparent amusement of the violin who shall not go unnamed: John Georgiadis. And the viola, Roger Best, belied his superlative. Of the strings Moray Welsh, the cellist, proved the most reliable, but it was always as individuals that they had to be thought of, never as a well-drilled, well-blended ensemble.

Roussel's Trio Op 40 is a work with more than good intentions, and I thought this came over quite successfully, with some of the effects perfectly caught. Certainly James Galway gave to the flute part all his ability to enrich and etherealise, and if it is not a work that strikes the deepest chords, it does have its moments. Each of the three movements is arresting without



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