

Gibson's directing robs 'Christ' of passion

The controversial movie is impeded by a reliance on unrelated flashbacks and liberties with the story

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

Making a film about a religious figure is always a difficult task. Trying to create a cohesive narrative out of the complex imagery and historical baggage collected over thousands of years is no small chore; filtering it through the personal vision of cinema increases the problems tenfold.

MOVIE REVIEW

For these reasons alone, "The Passion of the Christ" is one of the most ambitious projects of the year. But it takes more than ambition to make good cinema, something that director Mel Gibson should have kept in mind.

The film is a depiction of the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus Christ (played by James Caviezel), from his betrayal by Judas to his death on the cross. His resurrection is also briefly depicted at the end, but the film makes it feel like an afterthought. The dialogue is entirely in Aramaic and Latin, with subtitles. This is an apparent move toward authenticity, though that's rather beside the point. With most of the script citing directly from the Gospel, which is not the most dialogue-heavy of texts, there is little for the actors to actually say.

From a technical perspective, the film is well-made. Gibson creates a vision of biblical Jerusalem, which feels like a world unto itself. The cinematography is of particular note and manages to be both stylized but unobtrusive. For example, there is a "cross-eye view" shot during the crucifixion scene, where the camera rises with the cross as it is raised but always looks down at the spectators below. It's a great shot — one that doesn't draw much attention to itself.

The film's editing is a little more lopsided. There are some interesting juxtapositions, such as cutting from Pontius Pilate literally washing his hands of Jesus' execution to a flashback of Jesus and his disciples washing their hands before the last supper. But these cuts rarely work since they point to connections and deeper meanings that just do not exist. Gibson also has a fondness for slow-motion sequences that is at times infuriating. Much of the film's 126-minute running time is spent either showing the characters exchanging meaningful glances, or on the equally high number of times Jesus collapses from his beatings and slowly rises again. This sort of melodrama soon wears thin.

These are all problems that a more judiciously minded editor would have handled. The problems with the film's narrative, on the other hand, are what deter from it the most. Gibson can't seem to balance artistic license with the need to stick as close to the source as possible. Because characters in the film rarely say anything that is not in the Gospel, very little exposition and hardly any character development take place. Silent filmmakers used to handle these problems with imaginative

visual structures, but Gibson seems to lack this sort of filmmaking skill.

The exposition problem soon becomes so severe that anyone without a working knowledge of the Bible will have trouble figuring out who is who and why any of this is important. The audience for the film becomes entirely regulated to those familiar with the text, something that would be unforgivable in a filmmaker adapting, for example, "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Furthermore, when Gibson takes artistic license, it is often ill-advised. Many of his additions to the text are unnecessary at best and detrimental at worst. Aside from not being in any Gospel account, a flashback to the time when Jesus is happily working as a carpenter and being fussed at by his mother fits poorly into the film. The purpose of the scene is probably to show Jesus as a human being, but it fails. Throughout the film he seems like nothing more than a superhuman glutton for punishment. This is another area where the overall lack of exposition causes problems. By trying so hard to depict him as a divine figure — right down to the golden eyes — Gibson completely forgets to make Jesus a character anyone can relate to.

There are two areas of controversy surrounding the film that are worthy of discussion. The first is the charge of anti-Semitism, due the filmmaker's depiction of the Jews as directly causing Jesus' death. Since this is how the Gospel depicted it, the problem can be seen as being with the source material rather than the film itself. The film's real problem is that filmmakers don't seem to know how to depict the Jewish people they present. There are few distinct Jew-



Courtesy

James Caviezel plays Jesus Christ in Mel Gibson's controversial "The Passion of the Christ."

ish characters, and most Jews in the film are members of the faceless mob or one of the high priests. The Jews are so vaguely portrayed that they never seem to take on any personality. Those who are actually depicted as real characters only really become so after they realize the divinity of Jesus, which is a rather preachy attitude for the film to take. It only amplifies the feeling that this is nothing more than a two-hour sermon.

The other issue is the film's violence. While it is certainly bloody at times, this violence is mostly relegated to two sequences. The first is a

nearly 15-minute scene in which Jesus is beaten and flailed by Roman soldiers. The other sequence is the crucifixion scene, which is at least realistic. The violence is no worse than what appears in your average 1980s slasher film and accusing a crucifixion of being violent seems rather ridiculous.

These issues aside, the film feels like a wasted effort. While trying so hard to make his personal vision of Jesus' death, Gibson forgot to make a film.

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Folk dance workshop will feature Croatian instructor

Croatian choreographer Zeljko Jergan will teach a workshop this weekend at Mac's at the Vet's Club

By Natasha Chilingirian
Pulse Reporter

Each year, Veselo Community Folk Dancers invite a foreign dance instructor to share a different culture's moves with Eugene. This time around, they're presenting the lively, Eastern European jives of Croatia.

International choreographer and Croatia native Zeljko Jergan will teach a workshop during a song and dance festival this weekend at Mac's at the Vet's Club, located at 1626 Willamette St.

Veselo Community Folk Dancers



Courtesy

Folk band Chubritza will provide Eastern European music for a dance party Saturday night.

Steering Committee Chair Shirley Reeves said a Croatian dance theme was chosen for its upbeat

sights and sounds. "It's very cheerful music," she said. "They use mandolins and

miniature-sized guitars. It's very bouncy music — it makes you want to bounce a little bit."

Festival Coordinator Linda Ketchurn said Croatian dance mostly involves circle and line dances. Performers usually dress in embroidered costumes in combinations of red or blue with white, accompanied by elaborate head pieces adorned with flowers and streamers. She said the mood of the music often matches the colorful attire.

"The music is very pretty," Ketchurn said. "Sometimes it is melodic, and sometimes it is sorrowful and lamenting, but it is usually upbeat and happy."

Registration for the workshop starts at 9 a.m. on Saturday, and the lesson begins at 9:30 a.m.

Participants are invited to have lunch at Mac's at the Vet's Club restaurant at noon, and the workshop will resume at 1:30 p.m. and end at 4:30 p.m. Jergan will discuss the culture of his country at 11 a.m. on Sunday, followed by a coffee break at noon with free snacks. Workshop participants will then have a chance to wrap up their lesson during a workshop review from 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

During Saturday's lunch break, local band Balladina will perform traditional tunes from Greece and Croatia. The seven-member folk band, which plays regularly at Eugene's Saturday Market and has performed around the Northwest, sticks to music from the Balkan

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FRIDAY MARCH 12TH 2004

BODY MODIFICATION CELEBRATION!

FEATURING
Raffle & Door prizes including certificates for free tattoos and piercings!

LIVE MUSIC BY:
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On the 1st day ... They were Kittens,
Ambience by Radium-Z (PDX)

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9:00PM @ JOHN HENRY'S
77 W. BROADWAY - 21+ ONLY PLEASE

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SPECIAL THANKS TO LARA & BERTRAM, DOUG, CAMMIE, JOHN & DOROTHY, BROOKLYN JOHN & JESSICA, CHRIS & SHELLEY, AND HAM-O-SAURUS JOE!
WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU!

ACADEMY AWARD WINNER!
BEST DOCUMENTARY
The Fog of War
An Errol Morris Film
5:00, 7:05 & 9:05 Nightly Sun Mat 3:00

ACADEMY AWARD WINNER!
Best Actress—Charlize Theron
CHARLIZE THERON CHRISTINA RICCI
MONSTER BASED ON A TRUE STORY
FINAL WEEK! 8:45 Nightly Sun Mat 2:50

Triples of Belleville
5:10 & 6:55 Nightly Sat Mat 3:20

BIJOU LATENITE Fr-Sat \$5 Su \$4
Directed by Takashi Miike, Japan's premier stylist of ultra violence!
Unrated! Not for weak stomachs!
ICHI THE KILLER
Fri, Sat, & Sun 11:00 pm Next: TAI CHI MASTER

The Princess Bride
Fri, Sat, & Sun 11:10 pm SAT MAT 3:00 pm