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## **Jewish identity on the stage: the roles of Saint Matthew and Caiaphas the Elder in Stephen Adly Guirsis's' The Last Days of Judas Iscariot**

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JEWISH IDENTITY ON THE STAGE:  
THE ROLES OF SAINT MATTHEW AND CAIAPHAS THE ELDER  
IN STEPHEN ADLY GUIRGIS'S  
*THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in  
The Department of Theatre

by  
Andrew Paul Fafoutakis  
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## **Abstract**

The roles of Saint Matthew and Caiaphas the Elder in Stephen Adly Guirgis's *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* were performed in the fall of 2008 and elected as a thesis role at the time. This thesis is a written record of the actor's research and development of the characters. This thesis includes background information on the production, historical research on the characters, character analyses, reflections on performance issues and the rehearsal process, and production photos.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Stephen Adly Guirgis's *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* was performed as part of the Louisiana State University Department of Theatre's 2008-2009 main-stage season. The play itself was performed in the Hatcher Hall theatre from December 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008. This particular production was unique in the sense that it was to be a showcase for both of the Master of Fine Arts acting classes with the head of the MFA program co-directing with one of the M.F.A. students. This paper documents my experiences as an ensemble member of the production and focus on the roles of Saint Matthew and Caiaphas the Elder that I performed for the LSU production. Over the course of this document I will share background information on development of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, my historical research for my characters, the character analyses for Saint Matthew and Caiaphas, observations and notes made throughout the rehearsal process, and conclusions drawn during and after the performances. I will also provide visual documentation in the form of various production photos and journal entries. Before I proceed, I feel that I should give some background information on the production.

For most theatrical productions, the play is cast from a pool of actors and actresses that audition for the director, usually with a prepared monologue or two. However, the show's director, George Judy, cast the current M.F.A. acting class on the basis of seeing our work in the classroom and the rehearsal studio. George Judy had also seen some of our previous stage-work, so he was quite familiar with our talents and abilities. By the end of the spring semester of 2008, George had announced our various roles, so we had ample time to start studying the text and preparing for the production in the fall. It was also announced that our colleague and classmate, Scott Woltz, would also be co-directing

with George in order to give Scott more opportunity to gain experience in the field of directing. This was very exciting and nerve-wracking news for the rest of the class because this meant that we would share the stage with both of our directors. It also meant that one of our very own classmates direct us in a very important production. It was also a unique casting situation because the incoming M.F.A. acting class made up the rest of the cast, and our class had not yet had the opportunity to see and work with them. We were ecstatic to have some fresh perspectives come in to challenge and enhance our work.

The play's set was a fascinating and beautiful means of conveying the world of the play. The design for the set was to recreate a run-down courthouse that exists in a kind of limbo. This was a place between Heaven and Hell where one's fate was decided upon by a trial of their peers. Since the Hatcher theatre is a studio theatre that plays in the round, all of the action of the play must be visible. Not an easy task for any designer, director, or actor, but undergraduate designer Katie Headlee succeeded spectacularly under the tutelage of John Raley. Each corner of the set was used. In two opposing corners, a bench rested on each side for the prosecuting and defense attorneys. Another corner was used as the location for Judas Iscariot's "cell"; this was a place where few of the characters interacted because Judas was so far removed from everyone. Here, Scott as Judas would sit for the entire production, mostly in stony silence as he agonized over the betrayal of his dear friend. In the opposing corner was the judge's bench where the character played by George Judy spent most of his time onstage. In the center of the set was a witness stand with a swivel chair on a small platform where witnesses could enter and leave to give their testimony. Above the entire set, four television sets were mounted to face each audience bank so that various iconic pictures and slides could be shown along with video

footage. The video and other images helped reinforce different themes and motifs. The addition of digital media also created a closer relationship between the audience and the world of the play.

The costumes were an important element to this production because they helped manifest the world of the play and the people who inhabit it. It was an especially important element for me because a costume can aid in how I develop a character. Sarah Bacot, an undergraduate student and friend of mine, was a great asset as the costume designer. She created sleek and modern costumes with an impeccable timeless quality.

Ken White created a beautiful and haunting lighting design that could elicit grief, hope, and anguish all with a single light cue. Eun-Jin Cho also created a dazzling and haunting sound design with music samples from obscure pop hits to classical religious pieces that left many audience members wondering if a soundtrack was available for purchase.

We were also fortunate as a cast to have John Fletcher as our dramaturge and my understudy. At the time, I was in the midst of working on a staged reading of William Gibson's *A Cry of Players*, and John was kind enough to step in as my understudy in the times that I would be absent from rehearsal. As professor of theatre history at LSU, John was an invaluable source of information regarding religious theory, practice, and history. He also provided great insight into the many characters that inhabited the play and also gave me great inspiration as my characterizations of Saint Matthew and Caiaphas grew.

Joanna Battles also aided us as our vocal coach through the rehearsal process. She assisted us with various notes with regard to our clarity, volume, diction, and any dialect work that was necessary to our characters. I felt that we were very fortunate to have her



amongst our cast and crew because she provided strong and consistent notes. Her work was also welcomed because she would notice problems within our voice, which at times the directors could miss or gloss over. She was a bridge as well between the cast and the directors in finding a common vocabulary with which to approach our work.

Within the marriage of all of these design elements, the cast as an ensemble was left to bring to life this epic piece of theatre. It was a grand endeavor that was certainly intimidating. With thousands of years of historical research, countless books written on the subject of the Bible, and the tome that was the Good Book itself, it was easy for any one of us to get lost in any number of texts. I myself was nervous and terrified of tackling such iconic figures as Saint Matthew and Caiaphas the Elder. Fortunately, we were more than in good hands with George and Scott ready to lead the way and keep us on course.

## **Chapter Two: Historical Research**

With such a vast wealth of information at my fingertips, I was apprehensive about how to approach my research into the lives of Saint Matthew and Caiaphas the Elder. After reading the text of the play multiple times, I gathered that both men were very different but shared some common factors. The most striking fact was that they were both identified as Jewish. This factor was very important to me because throughout history, religious propaganda, and popular culture, the Jewish religion had been vilified. These groups went so far as to claim that all Jews were the cause of the death of Jesus Christ. Caiaphas the Elder is especially demonized as one of the primary factors that lead to the betrayal and death of Jesus Christ. This meant that I had to tiptoe carefully in my portrayals of these two men. I wanted to avoid stereotypes and brash characterizations that would leave my performance empty and hollow. In reading the text, I found these two men not defined by their religion but religious men faced with extraordinary circumstances. It was where these two men differed in their beliefs that I found myself most interested. Matthew was a Jew who left his religion and followed Christ into Christianity. Caiaphas was a Jewish rabbi who held onto his beliefs in his faith in God and his people. In bringing their lives off of the page and onto the stage, I decided that I wanted to keep my mind free and clear of ideas and images that might taint any notions that these men were good or bad, wrong or right.

In order to maintain neutrality in my view of these men, I opted to review very basic background information on these two men, rather than have my portrayals wrapped up in history and theory. I wanted to develop these characters from information gleaned from the script with some additional information. I first started my research by doing

countless searches on the Internet and visiting a few encyclopedic texts at the LSU library. I was very satisfied with the information I found at the Catholic Encyclopedia, an online reference tool. I found this site to be a great source of information because it included many references found in the Bible and other religious texts, but it did not contain any known biases in the information provided. It was here that I gathered most of my information about Saint Matthew and Caiaphas.

As mentioned in the text of the play and the Catholic Encyclopedia, Saint Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who ultimately served Rome. As mentioned by both sources, his fellow Jews despised Matthew for taking money and possessions from his people in order to serve their oppressors. Both resources also describe how Matthew chose to follow Jesus Christ after Christ called to him to follow him. The Catholic Encyclopedia also provided me with information that after Matthew chose to follow Jesus, he instituted a dinner at his home where taxpayers and sinners sat along with Christ and his disciples. This was an important note to me because it displayed a sense of Matthew's humanity and new life after his transition to Christianity. I also learned that Matthew was present at Christ's Passion and was a witness to his subsequent resurrection. Not much else is known about Matthew's life except that he preached his Gospel to the Hebrews for some time and then passed on his Gospel. Scholars are still unsure about Matthew's death, whether it was a natural death or caused through martyrdom. While this was not a complete picture of Matthew's life, I found the information beneficial enough to begin some work on developing Matthew's portrayal for our production, and it allowed me some freedom to imagine how Matthew, the man, lived. It also gave me artistic freedom to create and sculpt a portrayal of Saint Matthew

that the audience might not have imagined. Through rehearsals, I wanted to blend the historic knowledge of Matthew with a fresh interpretation of Matthew in our world of the play.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Caiaphas the Elder was a High Priest of the Jews and appointed by Pontius Pilate's predecessor. The article on Caiaphas relates that Caiaphas was in charge of the council that decided upon Christ's fate, with the meeting ultimately being held at Caiaphas' very own home. In fact, the hill where his home stood is referred to as the "Hill of Evil Counsel." While it may seem that Caiaphas' actions are quite dubious, the article continues that Caiaphas' actions were indeed foreseen according to the Gospel of John. While other references are made as to Caiaphas' reign as high priest and his persecution of Christ's followers, not much else is known after his reign ended. This also allowed me some freedom to imagine how he lived the rest of his days knowing that the consequences of his actions changed the world forever.

One very important aspect of the script that I wanted to explore is Caiaphas' numerous references to the 613 sacred laws of the Jewish Torah. In the play, Caiaphas decries Jesus as a rabbi, a Jew, and a man full of blasphemy. Under intense cross-examination by the prosecution, Caiaphas calls out, "Our Torah has 613 sacred laws—I can't even count how many Jesus broke or treated with wanton disregard and disdain!" (Guirgis 51). My next move was to delve into the 613 laws to see what they were and how they involved my characters in the play. Fortunately, I found a website that listed all of the 613 laws with citations called Judaism 101: A List of the 613 Mitzvot (Commandments). It was fascinating to find out what many of these sacred laws

involved. Some of the laws were quite beautiful and honorable to me such as number 53, “To love the stranger.” Some were confusing and strange to me such as number 333, “Not to pass a child through the fire to Molech.” Some even seemed to contradict each other, and others seemed to be in direct conflict with Caiaphas’ actions according to the play. Due to some of Caiaphas’ comments in the play, he breaks number 32, “Not to bear a grudge.” And 33, “Not to put any Jew to shame.”

Understanding the 613 sacred laws was crucial to me as a means of understanding how the Jewish religion played into both Matthew’s and Caiaphas’ lives. For Matthew, the laws stifled his life among his people causing him to find solace in a man who overlooked his sins and forgave them. In the case of Caiaphas, knowing the laws that he abided by allowed me to enter his mindset. Caiaphas used the laws of the Torah as a means to shield his people, his faith, and himself. Even though the laws were strict enforcements of a code that could be difficult for anyone to follow, I believed that Caiaphas used these laws as a moral compass by which he could live his life. Whether he could successfully live up to these standards was another matter, one that the play dealt with quite successfully. Having completed my research, I was more than ready to bring these characters to life and fashion them into three-dimensional human beings.

### **Chapter Three: Rehearsal Process**

Our first rehearsal with the full cast was a general reading of the script on October 27, 2008. Our reading of the play was a wonderful opportunity for the cast as an ensemble to get together with the directors and gain a genuine feel for the script and how it would flow. It was a very informative process because it allowed the directors to hear how the text would sound and make cuts or rearrange scenes if they deemed it necessary. It also became a wonderful opportunity for the actors to feel free to explore their characters with abandon. It was here in the first moments of rehearsal that the actor could make choices that might not necessarily fit the nature of the play, but would still provide a wealth of information.

It was interesting to note that for the majority of our rehearsals, the cast would be rehearsing the scenes in the acting studio of Hatcher Hall. When we neared the opening performances, we would then proceed to move from the studio to the actual set. For our reading, I wanted to explore the differing natures of these two men. A few days before the first rehearsal, I developed the idea that these two men shared some similar traits and beliefs. While they carried some similar characteristics, I came to the belief that these two men were from two different worlds. I decided that Caiaphas existed in an “old world” point of view with beliefs and ideas that were hurtful and outdated. He was a man who believed in a vengeful, cruel God that punished his children. On the other hand, I believed Matthew carried a “new world” perspective. From his history of being ostracized by his peers, Matthew was a lost man with a religion that failed to recognize him. After his meeting with Christ, Matthew was changed. Matthew came to believe in a loving, caring God that forgave his children regardless of their past transgressions. I

wanted to marry this “old world vs. new world” in the way I developed the characters for our production. One of my tools as an actor is to find the “voice” of my characters. This could mean that I could use my standard speaking voice, raise or lower my pitch in speaking, talk using different areas of my mouth, or even using a dialect. For these characters, I wanted to explore their voices by means of using a dialect. As Caiaphas, I wanted to investigate his “old world” view through the means of an Eastern European, Hebrew, and Yiddish mixed dialect that I constructed. For Matthew, I used a New York/Jewish hybrid dialect.

After the reading, we were given some notes and questions for us to think about in terms of the world of the play. With regard to Matthew, Scott and George wanted me to consider how I affected Jesus. They reminded the cast that the saints could not be ordinary. They asked us, “What is it that makes them iconic?” As Caiaphas, George wanted me to think of him as Jewish royalty strolling into a den of thieves. Caiaphas’ testimony was to set the record straight and denounce any myths or falsehoods about the Jewish people and the death of Christ. As mentioned in the script, Caiaphas avoids any eye contact with the defense attorney, Fabiana Cunningham, because he sees her as a woman and unclean. Scott suggested a great idea of avoiding eye contact throughout the entire scene. George reminded me that as Caiaphas, I had to be careful and not fall into the trap of being an inactive participant in the play. This meant that as Caiaphas, I had to keep all my energy active and move the piece forward. Being High Priest, I was defending the honor and name of my people, not succumbing to the persecution and vilification of my oppressors. Scott also informed me that he liked the choice for Caiaphas, but he wanted me to use my standard speaking voice for Matthew. At first I

was a bit upset that I could not keep the voice for Matthew, but little did I know that this would be the best decision made in shaping the development of Matthew.

My first day of rehearsing and staging the Saint Matthew scene began on November 2, 2008. Only my fellow cast member Nick Rhoton and I were called to this rehearsal because we shared the scene respectively as Saint Peter and Saint Matthew. I was excited because I had completely memorized my lines for this scene. This allowed me greater freedom to work and explore Matthew's inner life on the stage. Scott presented Nick and me with the idea that our saints would carry onstage an item that represented our whole being, almost like a talisman or icon. Peter would carry a net as he was a fisherman, and Matthew would hold a calculator, a symbol of his former life as a tax collector. As we ran through our monologues for the scene, I felt that something was missing. I felt as if the calculator was cumbersome and in the way of my acting the monologue. I became frustrated. I was also quite unsure why Guirgis included a break in the action of the trial to present two monologues by Peter and Matthew. We ran the scene again, and this time, Scott had me explore Matthew as a cold, mechanical machine. My actions were to be quick, robotic. I was a man bound by facts and figures, almost as if I was fused with the calculator. After we finished, Nick, Scott, George, and I talked about our characters, and Nick and I received various notes about our performances. We discussed the possibility that Guirgis added the scene as a counterpoint to the testimony supporting Judas. Our scene was to reinforce Christ's love and how he touched our lives. While the earlier parts of the play were building Judas' defense case, our characters were used as evidence to seal his fate to the jury and the audience. I mentioned my frustrations with the calculator, and John Fletcher presented a fascinating idea that I as Matthew was



not actually tallying up figures and possessions. In reality I was tallying up my past sins and trying to seek absolution. This idea breathed some new life into my work as Matthew, and I was more than ready to try working the scene again. After this run, I felt more satisfied about the direction of the scene and where the character of Matthew was headed.

Our second rehearsal of the Matthew/Peter scene was on November 5, 2008. It was here that I had a major breakthrough in my work with Matthew. Scott and George had us run the scene, and through this particular run, I tried to implement the robotic and mechanical ties that I was asked to include. As Nick and I began the scene, I felt emotionally distant from the piece and became frustrated. We soon finished, and George had us run the scene once more, noting that he would start and stop the scene to give notes. I began Matthew's monologue. Midway through the scene, I reached the line, "I was a scumbag, and it was against the law to look me in the eye" (Guirgis 25). George stopped me and asked me to repeat the line. This is an acting technique known as "dropping in." By repeating pieces of text or dialogue, the actor allows the words to affect him or her and reaches an emotional sensitivity to the piece. As I repeated "I was a scumbag...", tears began to well up in my eyes. I suddenly felt deep shame and anguish as the emotion swept over me. Through the language of the piece, I felt an instant connection to Matthew. We were kindred spirits. Memories of my own struggles and conflicts with my sexuality as a gay man came flooding back into my mind. I too knew what it was like to be ostracized by a community and by the people I loved. I too knew the heartbreak of simply living and struggling to survive as Matthew had. I finished the scene while looking at Nick and tears running down my face. I was comforted knowing

that Nick was there onstage with me, sharing my distress. I imagined that this was the way Matthew and Peter's relationship might have been. Peter would feed Matthew with love and support, much like Christ had done for both men. I had the realization that this was the work I needed to invest in every time I performed the scene in rehearsal or in front of an audience. After a short break, we returned for further notes. Joanna commented that I should concentrate on having my voice reach all of the audience members in the theatre. Since my blocking for this particular scene consisted of me sitting on a small bench against a pillar, Joanna wanted me to make sure that my voice carried to the audience members behind me in addition to the ones in front. She also said that as Matthew, I should not worry about smiling through the monologue because the smiles could cause tension in my jaw. This was a very informative note to me. Since I was dealing with harsh and tragic subject matter, I felt the constant need to "lighten" the mood and find some joy for Matthew.

We proceeded to take a short break and returned to work on the Caiaphas the Elder scene. During the entire scene, I felt that I was playing the "villain" between the prosecution and defense. My experience during the scene was that I was playing a bitter man filled with scorn and contempt for everyone around him. It was irritating because I knew that Caiaphas was a man with much more depth. Here, George reminded me that I should be fighting for something tangible in the scene. He challenged me to find what Caiaphas' reasons were for coming to the trial on this particular day. We discussed that Caiaphas must have been called to numerous trials such as this in the afterlife, so the question was, "Why did he come to *this* trial?" We agreed that Caiaphas was here at this trial to set the record straight once and for all regarding his role in the death of Christ. I

decided then that my objective was to clear the air. As Caiaphas, I felt a responsibility to denounce the lies and propaganda that had been spread throughout the years about the Jewish people and their connection with Christ. Being the High Priest and leader of the Jewish people, I also felt a deep-seated need to protect my people from harm and persecution. It was here that I seemed to have another breakthrough moment with my work on Caiaphas. I again felt a connection to this man and love for his people. I associated my pride and love for my Greek and Hispanic heritage with Caiaphas' pride and devotion for his people. I recognized that in a similar circumstance, I too would do whatever was necessary to protect the ones I loved. I too had felt the struggle to fight against lies and misinformation that have plagued a culture. My life as a gay man had up to this point been a constant battle to conquer gossip, myths, and bold-faced lies that were spread throughout history and popular culture. I instantly felt a strong understanding of Caiaphas' life and work. Due to my own personal plight, I suddenly recognized that there must be some deep pain and hurt feelings for one who feels that they must shoulder this responsibility to care for a whole community. It was here that I found more life and humanity in Caiaphas. We decided to run the scene again, and this time, I made the new adjustments that George and I talked about. Again, we would start and stop this second run with notes and direction. With my entrance, George asked me to sweep into the room and own the space. I was to be Jewish royalty and ascend my throne. George also asked me to examine my initial introduction to the prosecutor, El-Fayoumy. I was told to think about how my Jewish nature might deal with someone from a Middle Eastern descent. I began to think that Caiaphas would treat this man as a hostile attacker, someone who could be a potential threat. When El-Fayoumy says, "Shalom," a traditional Jewish

greeting, I decided to use my responses to “stab” him using the language of the play. As we progressed, George stopped us and talked to me about my relationship with El-Fayoumy. At the line “Are you asking me why I didn’t try to approach one of the Apostles initially?” I was asked to explore a teacher/student dynamic with El-Fayoumy. George and Scott thought it would be a great idea to imagine that at this point in the trial, Caiaphas would act as if he were giving religious instruction or preaching to the audience, i.e. his congregation. This would further humanize Caiaphas, and it would also allow me to actively pursue my objective to clear Caiaphas and the Jewish people of any wrongdoing. George and Scott asked me to find moments throughout the scene when Caiaphas would become the teacher and when he would revert to his royal status. It was at this point that George discussed with Kenneth and me the idea of acting “waves.” In these “waves” were moments of great intensity. Just like real waves, the action in each acting “wave” would rise, crest, and then fall back again, only to rise up again anew. We were asked to experiment with the text and find moments where the action would rise and fall. This time, I sensed that my actions and objectives were much stronger in this run of the scene. The scene would need some more work on my behalf, but for now, it was in a good place. Unfortunately, we would not return to my scenes in rehearsal for another few weeks because I would be in the middle of performances of *A Cry of Players*.

During my time off from rehearsal, I met with Sarah Bacot for various costume fittings and to discuss costume options for both Matthew and Caiaphas. As an actor, the costume can transform my ideas of the characters and how they move through space. It was important to me that Sarah and I were of the same mind-set about the characters. Sarah had already shown some preliminary designs on our first rehearsal, and informed

the cast that rather than have biblical representations of the characters, she would create sleek, modern outfits that would carry a timeless aura about them. At my first fitting she pulled vest, slacks, and a white-collared shirt for Matthew. We both liked the look because it was representative of Matthew's life as a tax collector, and the look was simple enough that it seemed to have an almost timeless quality to support her vision. I told Sarah that I would bring my own black dress shoes to complete the costume. The Caiaphas costume would include the same white shirt, pants, and shoes, but Sarah would create custom pieces in order to give him an air of sophistication and regality. She informed me that she was in the midst of building a cape and shawl costume piece that would fit over the shirt. I liked the idea of a cape because it would further reinforce Caiaphas' power and influence as the High Priest. To complement the costume, a Jewish yarmulke and a prosthetic beard were added to differentiate Caiaphas and Matthew. I was nervous and excited to use the prosthetic because this would be my first time using a piece in a production. Since Hatcher theatre is an intimate space, I needed to be cautious about using the beard because if improperly applied, the beard would look false and distract the audience. Although Sarah had not thought about it, I asked her if Caiaphas could also have numerous rings as a sign of his wealth and power. I thought they would be a nice addition to the costume, and the rings would give me a "toy" to play with onstage. When I use the term "toy," I refer to a prop or piece of costume in which my character or characters can channel emotional states. This could mean anger, frustration, anxiety, or sexual attraction. By using a "toy" onstage, it allows me as an actor to create business onstage. Sarah liked the idea of the rings and said she would try to find some good pieces to fit the costume. I knew now that my costumes as well as my characters

were on the right track. Now that I understood what I was to wear onstage, I was eager and excited to further explore the natures of my characters. I was ready to return to rehearsals and delve deeper into the characters.

After *A Cry of Players* closed, I returned to rehearsals on November 24, 2008. It was an interesting experience for me to transition from one production to another so quickly. I think this was a stressful but wonderful opportunity for me because my experience of switching from one show to another almost mirrored that of an actor in the professional world of theatre. It was a trying time as well juggling a heavy class load, an intense work schedule in the lighting department, and two shows. I had not even entirely memorized my lines for the Caiaphas scene. I met with my fellow classmate, Kenneth De Abrew over the weekend to rehearse lines. Kenneth was playing the prosecuting attorney El-Fayoumy, and we shared two considerably long scenes with each other. It was imperative that we learn our lines because we only had a few days before our technical rehearsals and the show's opening. We studied and rehearsed our lines for hours, and Kenneth was kind enough to assist me in learning my lines for my scene with the character Cunningham. I also discovered that a great way to learn my lines was by using a digital voice recorder. I owned a small microphone that plugged into my iPod mp3 player. With this device, I would record the lines of any characters with whom I shared a scene. From there, I would say my own lines and play the corresponding responses, thus running through the whole scene.

On my return to rehearsals, we picked up where we had left off with my work as Matthew and Caiaphas. We were fortunate that the set had been built in the Hatcher theatre, and we could now move our rehearsals from the acting studio to the stage. Due to

the change of environment, we needed to adjust accordingly. Entrances had to be reevaluated and re-timed so we could hit our marks at the right moment. We also had to work with the new set. As Matthew, I had to learn what it was like to sit on the bench for my entire scene. I had to discover how to sit comfortably and still be visible to the audience. With Caiaphas, I needed to work with the swivel chair and steps for the witness stand. I had to be careful on the small platform because there was so little room to move and play the scene. My blocking involved mostly sitting in the chair, but I also stood at various moments and had to navigate the platform without falling. On top of this work, I had to ensure that all of my movements in the chair allowed me to remain visible to various members of the audience. With care and consideration, I was able to find moments in the scene where I would move so as to remain visible to everyone. I was fortunate that John Fletcher had been my understudy because he had been a careful study of my work. It was beneficial to have him at the rehearsals I had missed because the actors in my scene did not have to suffer any setbacks from my absence. We proceeded to run the Saint Matthew scene without a hitch. My work from the previous weeks had stayed with me, and I was still able to tap into the emotional connection that I shared with the character. For Caiaphas, we ran with the work that I had implemented in the previous rehearsals, but it was here that I was still having trouble finding an emotional resonance with him. I was falling into the same trap of passively playing the scene. Here George suggested that I think of Caiaphas as a politician in addition to a piece of royalty. I found this to be a fascinating new layer I could add to my performance. As a politician, I would have to win over voters. I had to be strong, but warm. I had to be cool and confident but approachable. In order to clear my name, I had to charm the jury as well as the audience.

I needed to smile more and win the votes of all of the people observing the trial. In addition to the politician idea, Scott asked me to play around with the idea of Caiaphas as an animal, like a snake or an asp. Animal work for an actor can be very beneficial to the development of a character. It can inform how the character moves, speaks, or behaves. Caiaphas as a snake was an interesting concept because in my eyes, a snake was cool, calculated, and deadly. I now imagined that Caiaphas was a man that could strike and lash out at any moment at anyone who dared cross his path. I would merge the ideas of politician and snake in the hopes that the man who emerged would be a powerful force of nature capable of fighting to save himself and his people. As the rehearsal progressed, I noticed some difficulty in picking up cues and responding with the correct lines. George asked me to keep working on the lines. It was here that Joanna stepped in and provided me with some vocal notes. She informed me that in my scenes with my colleague Leigh- Erin, I had to be ever vigilant in storing unwanted jaw tension. The tension itself would cause me to tense up and close down, thus destroying my performance. Joanna also said I should take in more breath and allow it to drop into my body. I was reminded to use more of my “core,” the group of muscles around my abdomen, to stabilize myself and gain more breath capacity. By using more breath, I would relax and again release any unwanted tension. Perhaps my favorite note of the day was when Joanna told me to, “Fuck with the pace.” In the Caiaphas scene, I had many long monologues filled with energy and rage, which would erupt in the middle of my testimony. Through my memorization, I fell into repetitive patterns that would cause me to deliver my lines in the same declarative manner. I loved the note because it reminded me to have more freedom with the role and allow inspiration and creativity to fall in. It also shook me up and



reminded me to be present in the scene. Scott also made note of remembering to open up to each side of the stage as to be visible to the audience. It seemed that I was mostly directing my testimony to the judge as opposed to the jury and audience.

After my next rehearsal on November 28, 2008, I met with Joanna to discuss my work as Caiaphas. She wanted to caution me about my work being lost in the dialect. We worked on placing the voice and dialect in the front of my mouth. I expressed my concerns with losing the dialect, and we agreed that we if the audience could not understand any of my language, then the text of the play would be lost. I experimented with using a nasal placement in the mouth as well as a forward placement. In the end, Joanna informed me that my work was solid and to keep in mind to actively share the language with the audience.

As we entered our technical rehearsals, the cast and crew brought together all of the elements to fully run the production. The most troubling aspect for me was working with my Caiaphas costume. The cape/shawl piece was a new piece, and the fabric was tough and difficult to work with. Scott expressed dismay that he did not like the fabric used, and I agreed with him. Sarah and Scott decided that a more luxurious fabric should be used in order to make the piece look more elegant. The next thing that concerned me was working with the prosthetic beard. When I applied the beard with the help of our costume crewmember, Brittany Zimmerle, I was constantly afraid the beard would fall off. This was my first time working with the makeup product known as spirit gum in a production. Unfortunately the fears and doubts I carried about the beard seeped into my performance, and I could think of nothing but my makeup during all of my scenes.

On November 30, we had our final technical rehearsal with a full run. Sarah gave me the newly constructed costume piece, and we all concurred that the piece was beautiful. It also aided me in my belief in Caiaphas as a man of power and wealth. Throughout this particular run, I felt that as Matthew, I was unconnected. As Caiaphas, I wrestled with my connection to the piece as well as fight problems with my costume and prosthetic beard. It was frustrating because I understood what my performance level should be, but I was just unable to reach that apex. I felt the need to just hurry and finish the scene because I knew my performance was faltering and fading. As the scene ended, I rushed off the stage. I felt like I wanted to crawl into a hole and die. The next day we received notes from George via email. With Matthew, George asked me to “Establish your self as a genuine threat--Show us who you WERE--Then show us who you ARE through Jesus.” As for Caiaphas, George had plenty of notes for me:

Andrew, when we worked this the other day it was stunning...The last two runs you have gotten so distracted you just lost the guy...I know the lines and then the costume issues have distracted you, but it seems when one thing goes wrong for you the whole thing falls apart. Don't throw away the whole loaf of bread because one slice drops on the floor...Breathe and find the moment. You must really listen and respond, make discoveries...When you found each new moment in your long speeches it had natural and organic builds and was very powerful... When you recite, it goes narrative and we lose the powerful need of this proud and flawed man. You can be brilliant in this... Breathe and find those moments fresh... End the suffering... Protect your people.

As I read the notes, I understood exactly what George was talking about. I was grateful for these notes and found them to be spot on. I knew that this was the tough love that I needed. I was more than ever determined to take the notes to heart and return for our last rehearsal more focused. My goal was to work harder and give a better, stronger performance.

Monday night was our last dress rehearsal. This night was quite important because we would have a full audience of theatre students and LSU faculty. As the lights dimmed, my heart began to race. I tried to remember to implement George's notes and keep myself focused. When I made my entrance as Matthew, I took in the full house. I tried to show myself as a direct threat to the audience, but when I reached the line, "If you had no sheep, I took a child—your child" (Guirgis 25), I received an unexpected response of laughter from the audience. This shook my concentration for a split second, but I stayed in the moment. I noted for future performances, that I might receive the same reaction. While the scene progressed, my connection to Matthew re-surfaced and our similar needs for love and acceptance washed over me. As I reached the line, "Jesus, he looked me in my eye. That's all he did" (Guirgis 25), tears streamed down my face, and I felt an instant rapport with the audience. While I made eye contact with various audience members, I noticed that they were just as connected to my story. It was an exhilarating experience. It was one of those moments that every actor and artist lives for. As I swept onto the stage for Caiaphas, I found it amusing that I received a few snickers and gasps from people in the audience who recognized me. Since I had grown accustomed to the prosthetic beard, I felt confident and comfortable that it would not fall off during the performance. I surrendered myself to the notion that Brittany had applied the beard successfully, and I promised myself that I would not worry about my costume. This allowed me to relax and focus on the scene. I noticed that I was more present this time around in the Caiaphas scene, and I felt more connected to my scene partners. Near the end of the scene, I reached another emotional climax. In my final monologue, I reached the lines, "And never try to excuse or forgive me because, I'm not interested in your forgiveness"

(Guirgis 54). Here I finally felt the pain and resentment that I imagined Caiaphas experienced. I was shaking and crying as I recited the words. The audience seemed to melt away as my focus was centered only on berating El-Fayoumy. Again, this was an emotional climax that I could not have imagined I would reach. I was fortunate that all of my hard work and rehearsal had paid off. The audience was just as deeply connected to this story as well as to Matthew's. It was truly a moment where I said to myself, "This is why I am an actor. This is why I want a life in the theater." I finished the scene and ran off to the dressing room covered in tears. I was so proud of the work, and I hoped I had redeemed myself from the poor performances two days prior. This truly was my best and most honest performance to date.

## **Chapter Four: Performances**

Tuesday, December 2, 2008, was our opening night performance. Tensions and nerves were still high even though we had an audience the night before. Like all of my previous rehearsals, I came to the theater to perform a warm up so my voice and body would be prepared for the night's work. I felt that it was imperative to engage in a warm up because it allowed me to review my lines and ease into practice of my voice and dialect. As this show progressed, I felt that my performances as Matthew and Caiaphas were not quite as connected as the night of the final dress rehearsal. The performances did not feel as difficult as those in the technical rehearsals, but I knew that they could have been better. I wanted my performance for the next night to be stronger and more focused. I came to the realization that throughout the night, I had been goofing around, talking, and joking with the other cast members up to the point before I had gone onstage. This left me disoriented and unfocused in my preparation for each scene. I decided that I would return home to study my lines and regroup.

For the Wednesday performance, I chose to listen to music before my scenes. I brought my iPod mp3 player with me to listen to music backstage. I believe that music has a powerful impact on our lives, and I thought that it could tap a reservoir of untapped emotional connection. I used the motion picture soundtrack from the movie Once because I loved the haunting, emotional, and raw folk music by Glen Hansard. Two particular songs, "Falling Slowly" and "Say it to Me Now" played integral roles in my preparation before I went on as Matthew. With "Say it to Me Now," the guitar riffs and Hansard's vocals awoke something inside of me. As he sings, "Cause this is what you've waited for, your chance to even up the score. And as these shadows fall on me now... I will

somehow. Cause I'm picking up a message, Lord, and I'm even closer than I have ever been before," tears would well up inside of me. I suddenly remembered my work and connection to Matthew. As I entered for the scene, I was on the cusp of breaking down. I gave a stronger performance overall. My concentration was intense, and I was more attuned to the circumstances of the play and my work with my fellow cast members.

Our Thursday performance was much the same as the night before. I continued to listen to my music before each performance and warm up before getting into my costume and make up. Matthew and Caiaphas were as consistent as the night before, and I felt fortunate that my work and investment in the characters was reaching its full potential.

The performance on Friday was a special performance for me. My parents had come into town to visit and see the show. I decided then that I would use my performance as Matthew to "come out of the closet" to my parents. I wanted to reveal my sexuality not out of selfish reasons but as a means to finally be free of any fear and self-loathing that remained inside of me. During Matthew's monologue, my objective to tell my parents the truth fueled my performance. I was so nervous that I was shaking and trembling as I made my entrance. While the words spilled out of my mouth, tears streamed down my face. I kept thinking, "Tell them." Throughout the entire monologue my gaze was pulled towards them in the audience as I made eye contact with other members of the audience. After the show, I talked to my parents about the performance. They loved the production, and I used the discussion to finally reveal my secret to them. My parents were quite surprised, but they welcomed me with open arms and love. I was relieved, and I silently thought to myself that I probably could not have told them without these roles or my life in theater. It was a liberating and exhilarating experience. In fact, the next day I received

an email from a former vocal teacher, Dr. Loraine Sims. In her email, she addressed Kenneth, Yohance, and me with many kind and considerate compliments. She said that she highly enjoyed our collective performances. She also said, “It was a powerful production...many ups and downs...laughs and tears. Congratulations to you and to all your colleagues and director.” It was so rewarding to hear such positive feedback from a former professor. It was incredible to see the sold-out audiences every night and observe how they would become attached and mesmerized by the piece. From various students and faculty members, I would hear nothing but great reviews for the work of the cast and crew. Even in remote places around Baton Rouge, different people would congratulate us on our successful production thus far. The responses to the show were tremendous, and I could never have been more proud to be a part of such a talented ensemble.

The final performances on Saturday and Sunday went without a hitch. I do not think that my work was as strong or as powerful as it had been on the Friday night performance. Each performance was solid, and I hit each moment that I wanted to reach. Even though the performances were not the same caliber as the one on Friday, I was still very proud of the work. This production was perhaps the first performance where I would go home every night and think about what I could do to improve the future performances. I wanted nothing more than to tackle the work over and over again. It invigorated me to know that I could pour myself into my work and shape it even further. Here again was another important breakthrough for me as an actor and artist. This was a symbol of huge growth for my work as an actor. To understand that my work was constantly growing and continuing to evolve was a huge step in the right direction for my growth as an actor.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

*The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* was rewarding, exhausting, and contained quite possibly my most challenging roles to date. What I thought was initially two minor roles in an epic piece of theatre turned out to be two stand-out roles that audience members seemed to remember vividly. Having sold-out audiences that were touched and moved from laughter to tears was one of the reasons I chose to enter the field of theatre. Students and various members of the Baton Rouge community would come to me and tell me that it was the best show they had seen at LSU or in Baton Rouge.

This piece also allowed me to face some demons from my past and move forward in my growth as an actor. Through the work, I was able to reveal my true self to my parents as a gay man, and in turn, I was welcomed with love, acceptance, and open arms. It was quite liberating to conquer my longtime fears and emerge from the ashes as a stronger artist, almost like the phoenix of ancient mythology.

Of course the piece itself was a complete ensemble effort, and we could not have been able to pull it off without the strong, talented direction of George Judy and Scott Woltz. A tremendously talented and creative backstage crew also supported us. While some of the work was visible onstage, a lot of hard work was never even seen by the audience. It was certainly a unique experience sharing the stage and being directed by one of my classmates, but I would certainly enjoy having Scott as a director again. Scott was a wonderful director who listened, worked well with his actors, and gave strong, poignant direction. I hope he continues to pursue an interest in directing because he certainly has a knack for it, and it showed throughout this production.



Working on this production was a cathartic and therapeutic experience for me. I can only dream that my work in the future will be as challenging or rewarding. The themes of the play concerning love, loss, life, death, and redemption are as current today as they will be hundreds of years from now. I hope *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* will ring as true for the audiences of the future as it did for our audiences here in Baton Rouge. From the audience responses, it seems that our production will be talked about for years to come. As a part of a fantastic production such as *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, I can only imagine how this piece will continue to influence and inspire the students and faculty here at LSU. Being a part of a production that touched so many people was one of the reasons that many of us became actors, actresses, and artists. It only encourages me to pursue my dream of living a life in the theatre. Through my work, I want to continue to bring laughter and tears to an audience member at a moment's notice. I hope to leave a lasting impression on them through my performances, for that is when I will know that I have achieved true success as an actor.

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## Appendix: Photos



Production Photo: Judas, Cunningham, Satan, and Judge. (Photo by Nick Erickson)



Production Photo: Judas' "Cell." (Photo by Nick Erickson)



Production Photo: Saint Matthew. (Photo by Nick Erickson)





Production Photo: Caiaphas the Elder on the witness stand. (Photo by Nick Erickson)



Production Photo: Caiaphas, El-Fayoumy, and Judge. (Photo by Nick Erickson)

## **Vita**

Andrew Fafoutakis was born in 1983, in Las Vegas, Nevada. He spent his childhood growing up in Spain, California, and finally Texas, where he received most of his primary and secondary education. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in theatre arts from the University of Minnesota in May 2005. The Master of Fine Arts degree will be conferred on Andrew at the May 2009 Commencement ceremony.