



Easter in film,
stage and musicals

Description

Presenting four of my favourite entertainments for Easter time

By **Byron Toben**

While there are many children's entertainments for Easter (many animated) dealing with eggs and bunnies, there are surprisingly few with more adult approaches.

My favourite four are:

Easter Parade, the hit 1948 film musical by **Irving Berlin** starring **Judy Garland** and **Fred Astaire** along with **Peter Lawford** and **Ann Miller**. It includes 15 songs, including the title song, which had earlier appeared in Berlin's *Holiday Inn*.

Garland was later revealed to have been pregnant at the time (with Liza Minnelli) and Astaire was a last-minute replacement for Gene Kelly, who had broken his ankle. These situations did not diminish their performances. The film went on to be the highest-grossing musical of 1948. Lots of fun and joy, let alone some neat bonnets!

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Jesus Christ Superstar began life as a 1970 album with rock opera music by **Andrew Lloyd Weber** and words by **Tim Rice**. Its popularity led to a 1971 stage production and many revivals, as well as a 1973 film. Featuring some twenty songs, it played internationally and won several awards.



Frame from the Jesus Christ Superstar film (1973)

In Montreal, a parody called **Jesus Christ, Super Band** played several Easter seasons at the intimate Theatre Ste-Catherine and was favourably [reviewed by moi](#).

On a more serious note, is **Sean O'Casey's** 1926 play **The Plough and the Stars** set during the **1916 Easter Rising** in Dublin, part of his Dublin trilogy, the others being *Juno and the Paycock* and *Shadow of a Gunman*. The title refers to the starry flag of the ill-fated Irish Citizens Army.

After its controversial initial run at the Abbey Theatre, defended by both **W.B. Yeats** and **Lady Gregory**, it was eventually made into a 1936 John Ford movie with **Barbara Stanwyck** and **Preston Foster**. The centennial of the Easter Rising in 2016 saw productions at both the Old Vic and the National Theatre in England, as well as at Banff in Canada.

The film [The last Temptation of Christ] had to add disclaimers that it was not based on the Gospel, but the imagined psychological delusions of a tortured soul.

The Last Temptation of Christ, based on **Nikos Kazantzakis'** controversial 1955 novel, was released as an even more controversial 1988 Martin Scorsese film.

Critically acclaimed, it was a box office failure. It posits a Jesus saved from the cross by an angel (possibly Satan in disguise), who survives to marry Mary Magdalene and have children as well as a quiet content life until meeting Paul in his old age, resulting in a return to the cross.

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After revisiting these last two "heavy" shows, I feel impelled to add at least one cheery child's Easter animation. How about **It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown**.

Enjoy!



Feature image: frame from the Last Temptation of Christ film (1988)

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Byron Toben, a past president of The Montreal Press Club, has been WestmountMag.ca's theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites Rover Arts and Charlebois Post, print weekly The Downtowner and print monthly The Senior Times. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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