

# The gospel according to Theatre Kingston

## Theatre Review

### *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* @ Theatre Kingston until April 15

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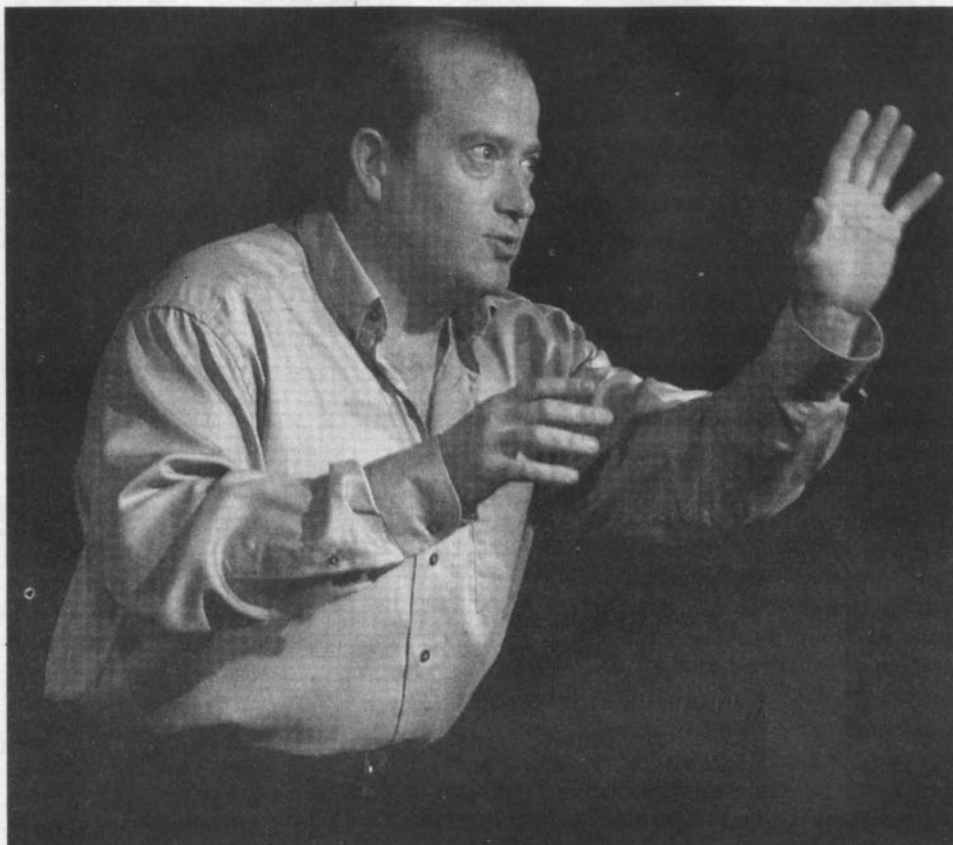
Opening this week at the Wellington Street Theatre, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* is not a wittily titled story about the life and opinions of a guy named Mark. At least, not really. It's the Bible. Yes, really. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* is just that, the gospel, performed as a one-man tour de force by local actor Matthew Gibson. And it's good.

Regardless of whether you, like a certain *Journal* A&E writer, are non-religious and without all but the barest knowledge of what is arguably the most popular story of all time, Theatre Kingston's play has great merit. The production has its roots in storytelling, first and foremost, and those responsible for the show come from backgrounds of theatre as opposed to religion.

"Neither Matthew nor I are particularly religious ourselves," director Jennifer Gibson told the *Journal*. "This has been an interesting learning process, and I found the text was made more accessible to me by the fact that the learning took place through a paradigm with which I am very familiar—the process of developing a show."

Similarly, while the production is certainly educational, the information is presented to the audience in such a way that the material is neither dry in its content nor aggressive in its message. This decision was intentional on director Gibson's part, in an attempt to showcase the quality of the storytelling rather than the significance of the story at hand.

"To us the issue here is not belief—we are



Matthew Gibson is a tour de force in *The Gospel According to St. Mark*.

PHOTO BY KATRINA LUDLOW

certainly not trying to evangelize or 'bring people to Jesus,' " said Gibson. "Our intent is simply to present this beautifully written and exciting story in as engaging and faithful a manner as possible. What audience members take from the show is up to them."

Whether or not you're interested in tackling great theological questions during a night on the town is certainly a personal choice, but it's difficult to avoid becoming engaged with Matthew Gibson's stellar vocal and physical performance. With no props or costumes, a sparse set and very simple

sharpness of characterization, and his sense of humour," said Gibson. "The show honestly has broad appeal across all sorts of boundaries, and we're urging folks not to be 'weirded-out' by the idea that the script is the Bible."

Aside from the genuine quality of the story unfolding onstage, what is most striking about the production is Gibson's ability to bring the story to life for a full two hours, embodying countless characters and memorizing what amounts to more than 16,000 words. For even a skilled actor, such a challenge in memorization and characterization would be next to impossible, yet Gibson makes it look easy—one minute he's a disciple, the next he's an old woman, then suddenly he's an angry protestor.

"Matthew would spend the early parts of the day learning the text," Gibson told the *Journal*. "And then we rehearsed together for roughly four hours each weekday and six hours per day on weekends."

*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* is an impressive endeavour on many artistic levels and worth checking out as a one-of-a-kind theatrical experience alone. Perhaps what is the most appealing quality of the show, however, is the contextual framework it gives the audience, which is something you get to keep and take with you at the end of the show. Whether you're religious, atheist or somewhere in between, Christianity and people's responses to it have a far-reaching influence on so many issues facing mankind today that it's impossible not to have an opinion on the subject. Theatre Kingston's show will give you a little food for thought on the issue, in return for just two hours of your time. Plus, someone walks on water.

technical effects, actor Gibson is left to his own devices on stage and the result is almost magnetic. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the text really is a great story—blind men regain their sight, pigs become possessed by demons and someone curses a fig tree because he was hungry, damn it, and it wasn't fig season yet. Taken directly from Saint Mark's gospel as included in the King James version of the Bible, the stories are a lot funnier than you might be inclined to expect.

"We were drawn to the spare, muscular, and no-nonsense quality of Mark's prose, his