

Justin Murphy does not lack for ambition.

At 25, Murphy has embarked on his second career. The former comic book artist -- who still works in the graphics department of WJXT TV-4 -- is now pursuing a career as actor and impresario.

He's producing and starring in a production of **Jesus Christ Superstar** that will play the Florida Theatre for four performances beginning Thursday.

Murphy has pulled together an impressive cast and crew for his show:

James Beeks, a Douglas Anderson School of the Arts graduate currently appearing on Broadway, is his Judas.

David Bedella, who played Caiaphas from 1992 to 1995 in the national touring company, will be Murphy's Caiaphas.

Roger Butterley, a Jacksonville native who has worked as conductor and arranger for Phoebe Snow, will serve as arranger and conductor for the show, working with an 18-piece orchestra complete with string section.

Bob Butterley, Roger's brother, a rock singer and actor who used to play the Alhambra Dinner Theatre regularly and more recently has been working off-Broadway, will play Pontius Pilate.

Michelle Ottley Fisher, head of the dance department at Landon Middle School, is director and choreographer.

Johnny Pettigrew of Florida Community College at Jacksonville is doing the sets.

Tod Booth Jr., stage manager for the Alhambra, will be the stage manager.

The point, Murphy insists, is that this isn't community theater, even if it is being produced in Jacksonville. In fact, if he had his druthers, this story wouldn't mention that this **Jesus Christ Superstar** is a local production, not a touring bus and truck show.

Sandra Floyd, event coordinator and operations manager for the Florida Theatre, said she sympathized with that position. "People in this town equate local with amateur," she said. "But from what I've seen, this is a quality production."

Murphy did not study music in high school or college though his mother, Cathy Murphy, who is his musical director, used to teach music at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts and now works as musical director at Crossroads Church.

"I was really engrossed in art," he said. But after graduating from Jacksonville University with a degree in computer art and design, he was bitten by the performing bug.

The role and the show that particularly drew his interest was the title character in **Jesus Christ Superstar**, the flamboyant rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice that debuted on Broadway in 1971 after first being produced as a record album.

When he couldn't interest any local theaters in mounting the show -- "It's too vocally demanding," he said -- he produced it himself in the summer of 1995 in a Jacksonville Beach church. The favorable reaction to that production convinced him he could make a more ambitious production work.

Murphy won't talk about how much the show is costing him, but the Florida Theatre doesn't come cheap, with nightly rentals ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,000. And Murphy has mounted an ambitious advertising campaign.

Murphy has two partners in the production, one of whom was formerly his partner in *Southern Blood*, a comic book about the Civil War written and drawn by Murphy.

Regardless of how **Jesus Christ Superstar** is received, Murphy has plans for a future in show business. He and Roger Butterley are collaborating on *Eagle Song*, a musical about the Civil War. "I want to write, and I want to be on the other side of the curtain," he said.

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