Jesus Christ Superstar is a rock opera. The film version came out in 1973 and it is a “cult movie.” Texan actor Ted Neeley played Jesus Christ: 37 years later he is still playing Jesus in the stage version. The first version of Jesus Christ Superstar came out in 1970. It was an album or “LP” (long-playing record). Andrew Lloyd Webber wrote the music and Tim Rice wrote the words, or lyrics. Lloyd Webber has written many popular musicals and today he is one of the richest people in Britain. His official title is “Baron Lloyd Webber”; Tim Rice is now “Sir Timothy Rice.” Ian Gillan sang the part of Jesus Christ on the album. In 1970 he was the lead singer of the rock group Deep Purple: he still is today.

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The musical
In 1971 Jesus Christ Superstar became a musical on stage. It was a show on New York’s Broadway. Critics were negative and religious groups hated it, but the public liked it. It closed in 1973, after 711 performances. The show also played in London’s West End. It opened in 1972 and closed after eight years. This was a record.

The movie
Canadian Norman Jewison directed the film. Next month he celebrates his 82nd birthday. Englishman Melvyn Bragg wrote the screenplay. In 1978 Bragg presented The South Bank Show, a new TV arts programme. This year it closed after 32 years. The cast of Jesus Christ Superstar included an American singer Carl Anderson, who played Judas Iscariot. Carl Anderson was black and some people didn’t like this: a black Judas Iscariot seemed racist. But it wasn’t a problem for Anderson: he played Judas in the stage version of Jesus Christ Superstar many years later. Unfortunately, he died of leukemia in 2004. Originally, Ted Neeley wanted to play Judas Iscariot, but he played Jesus. Neeley is still playing Jesus in the stage version today. He is 66. He said in a recent interview: “In the show I say, ‘My time is nearly through.’ That’s me in life. I don’t know how much time I’ve got.”