



Nick Krieg portrays Jesus in the Clark College production of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

# Jesus Christ rock star

Conveying Messiah's suffering on stage inspires musician struggling to provide for family

By BRETT OPPEGAARD  
for The Columbian

Everyone who stages "Jesus Christ Superstar" encounters the ultimate casting dilemma:

Who's going to be the Messiah?

Tami Castillo Gray, director of the Clark College production that opens Friday, decided to prepare for that weighty decision in the way that felt most natural.

She prayed.

No one knows for sure how the historical Jesus Christ looked. He's been

pictured with skin from pale pink to black, hair cropped short and curly or left long and straight. He's been drawn imposing and thin but has been described by scientists as short and stocky. In America, he's depicted as tall and white, with long brown hair, a full beard and deep brown eyes.

None of these iconic images has tattoos and short, spiky red hair.

Appearances alone

should have eliminated Nick Krieg from contention.

The 26-year-old lead singer of the local band The Experimental Earth aspires to be a rock 'n' roll star, not a Broadway thespian. He went to audition for the role of the most renowned religious figure in human history on a whim. He has never taken an acting class.

The biggest role of his career? Playing Dr. Frank N.

Furter in the Clinton Street Theater troupe that mimics the on-screen action of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

Yet Gray chose him from the 30 actors who filled Gaiser Hall for the audition a few months ago.

"I was looking at the core of who (the actors) are, and Nick stood out," she said. "He was the person meant to do this role."

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## If you go

■ **What:** Clark College Theatre presents "Jesus Christ Superstar," with music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice, the same team that later collaborated on "Evita" and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

■ **When:** Friday through March 1, with performances at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday as well as Feb. 22-23, plus additional shows Feb. 28-29 and March 1. An accompanying dinner, prepared by the school's culinary department, will be served starting at 6 p.m., Friday and Saturday as well as Feb. 22-23.

■ **Where:** Clark College's Gaiser Hall, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** \$30 for dinner shows, \$14 for performance only.

■ **Information:** 360-992-2815 or [clark.edu](http://clark.edu).



Nick Krieg has a full-time job maintaining and repairing commercial dish washers as well as a weekend job at Burgerville to support his wife and daughter. Krieg dreams of one day making it big as a rock star.

ONLINE VIDEO: To view a video about Nick Krieg, who stars in Clark College's production of "Jesus Christ Superstar," visit [www.columbian.com/video](http://www.columbian.com/video).





Nick Krieg rehearses his role as Jesus Christ along with the rest of the cast of "Jesus Christ Superstar" at Clark College.

Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

## Krieg:

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When Krieg received the call offering him the prized — yet unpaid — part, he responded, "Hell, yes! Who doesn't want to be Jesus?"

### Sacrifices

Krieg took the opportunity despite not knowing how he would fit such a demanding task into his already hectic schedule.

It was still dark when Krieg set out at 6:30 on a recent morning for Scappoose, Ore., to begin an 11-hour shift of repairing and servicing commercial dishwashers for Auto-Chlor.

His nearly 2-year-old daughter, Caydence, and wife, Shona, were asleep in their Orchards home when he left.

Krieg listened to the "Jesus Christ Superstar" soundtrack as he drove between appointments in the morning. By afternoon, he was ready for a change, so he switched the truck's stereo to the hard-rock band Tool's "10,000 Days."

When he returned to downtown Portland, he took a detour between his final stops to fill out an apprenticeship application at the Carpenters Union Hall.

The coincidence suddenly struck him. Jesus was a carpenter.

For years, Krieg had been thinking about following in the footsteps of his father, all five of his uncles and three of his cousins by joining the apprenticeship program.

He can't explain why, but he felt compelled to sign up that day.

"Maybe the powers that be are giving me the right direction," he said.

He hopes becoming a carpenter would enable him to make more money and have more time with his family.

In addition to the 50 to 60 hours a week Krieg works for Auto-Chlor, he also takes on two weekend shifts at Burgerville to help pay bills and maintain health benefits. He's rarely

had a day off in the seven years since he moved from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to Clark County.

He needs to take time soon, though, to move his family's belongings out of his rental home and into a cheaper one. Even working seven days a week, he can't afford the rent at the 1,200-square-foot Orchards house since his mother-in-law recently moved out.

When his shift ended at 6 p.m., Krieg didn't have time to unload the equipment from his truck. He left the shop quickly, getting home at 6:20. Rehearsal starts at 7 p.m.

His daughter, Caydence, was eating noodles in her highchair. She announced, "I wake up." He quickly acknowledged her, then hustled into his bedroom and traded his work uniform for gray sweat pants, a comfortable shirt and a long black coat. He sat momentarily in a recliner and laughed at the images on the television screen while he pulled on a pair of furry boots, adding an artist's flair to an ensemble primarily plucked from Value Village. Then he sprung to his feet again.

He and his wife swapped an "I love you." He turned to his daughter and said, "Bye, bye." The two exchanged a high five. The girl declared: "Rock 'n' roll!" Krieg, on cue, headed out the door.

On the way to Clark College, he whipped his family's lone car, a Hyundai Sonata, into a Burgerville drive-through lane. He ate his Half-Pound Colossal Cheeseburger meal in the car and finished it just as he pulled into Clark's parking lot. He burped under his breath as the cast warmed up.

By the time rehearsal ended three hours later, Krieg's daughter was asleep again. He wouldn't get to see her the next morning either, when he again headed to his dishwasher-repair job before dawn.

"This is definitely the absolute most I can put on my plate," he said. "There is no room for anything else. I come from the mentality that we never really push ourselves to our full human limit. But, sometimes, I'm definitely pushing myself."

Krieg shrugged off his trials and tribulations. Repeatedly reliving the suffering of Jesus in his final days at rehearsal has a way of putting things in perspective.

"I never feel sorry for myself — ever," he said. "It's gratifying to know that I am doing the most that I possibly can do for me and my family and the future of my career. ... If you have a dream, and you want something that's kind of far out in the stars, and you are reaching for it, you have to work really hard."

### Struggle and redemption

Krieg, not a church-goer himself, must trade his struggle for Jesus' when he steps on stage.

The show depicts the final seven days in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his crucifixion.

What makes the piece prickly for religious groups is its portrayal of Jesus as a relatively ordinary human, who has doubts about God, loses his temper at times and is tempted by the love of Mary Magdalene.

The story doesn't end with the resurrection of Jesus, the critical part of the Biblical tale that separates him from other prophets.

The Vancouver branch of Christian Youth Theater, which specializes in musicals, won't even consider presenting this one, area coordinator Bethany Larson said.

"Jesus Christ Superstar" is not on the list of recommended productions given out by CYT's national headquarters in San Diego, either.

"We believe that Jesus didn't sin," Larson said.

Director Gray agrees that Jesus was without sin, but she interprets the events in this Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice show more as tests of character.

"People forget that Jesus was born," Gray said. "That he was a child and had playfulness. That he had the need to eat and sleep. That he needed human contact. ...

"He loved others, just as we think of a God in heaven doing. But he also could show his righteous anger. He was a human being, not perfect.

To read that and see it portrayed are two different things. Physically seeing that can be uncomfortable."

Gray challenges the idea that this piece is somehow sacrilegious.

She traces the seeds of her conversion to Christianity back to the mid-1980s, when, as a dancer studying at Portland State University, she was recruited to join the cast of a version of "Jesus Christ Superstar" produced by Vancouver's Peanut Gallery.

She later joined a church and was baptized. She credits strong Christian faith for relieving mysterious and debilitating health problems in her youngest son, Connor.

When the boy was 18 months old, he had a seizure in the car while Gray was driving. As her child turned blue, and his eyes rolled to the back of his head, Gray panicked and began weaving through traffic to try to hurry to the nearest hospital.

As she was just about to cross a busy street against traffic signals, Gray heard a hushed male voice inside her mind say, "It'll be OK." She felt suddenly at peace. She calmly continued on her route, and the boy stabilized and eventually recovered at the hospital. He has undergone naturopathic treatments since, and his chronic symptoms disappeared.

Gray has heard the mysterious voice give her direction many times since, particularly during intense church missions in Third World countries.

Gray said that Christianity "put the possibilities of miracles into my life."

She therefore had no doubt that the perfect person for the part of Jesus would appear at her audition. She's never second-guessed her choice, even if Krieg doesn't share her enthusiasm for religion.

"I have more my own relationship with God, rather than following a set of dogmatic rules," Krieg said. "A lot of people get wrapped up in life and lose sight of what their true inspiration is. I've gotten the inspiration I need from this story, and I didn't need to go to church to get it."

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Nick Krieg

Nick Krieg plays his guitar while his wife, Shona, chases their daughter, Caydence, around their home. Krieg plays in a local rock band, The Experimental Earth, but has put the band on hold while he works on his role as Jesus Christ.



Nick Krieg spends a moment with his daughter, Caydence, and wife, Shona, at home. He juggles family time and his featured role in "Jesus Christ Superstar" with working seven days a week and playing in a rock band.