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God Is His Co-Pilate

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By [Kristina Dorsey](#)

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Try to withstand the urge to hiss at Pontius Pilate - he's a hometown boy.

In the tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar," which begins a three-night stint at the Garde Arts Center starting today, the actor playing the man who ordered Jesus' crucifixion is Craig Sculli.

Sculli grew up in Newington but spent his weekends and summers at Giants Neck in Niantic when he was a child. His parents, Joe and Anna, and grandmother, Rose, still live here.

Sculli, 31, says, "When I was a kid, I used to dread going down (to Niantic), because I would miss my friends. Now, I'm an adult, and I love going."

IF YOU GO:

WHAT: "Jesus Christ Superstar"

WHERE: Garde Arts Center,

State Street, New London

WHEN: 7:30 tonight, Wednesday and Thursday

TICKETS: \$44-\$65

CONTACT: 444-7373,

gardearts.org

Back in the early 1990s, the then-teenager was, in fact, on stage here. He was part of the Waterford Week Players' "Meet Me in St. Louis."

"I was in the ensemble and thrilled," he says. "That was a lot of fun ... I was bored in the summer. As a kid, that was a nice outlet for me."

It was in those early years - in middle school in Newington - that Sculli first encountered "Jesus Christ Superstar." His music class actually spent two to three weeks studying the movie version, which, as the current tour does, starred Ted Neeley as Jesus. He was intrigued by the idea of a rock opera and had his mother buy him the album.

HIS TIME IN EAST LYME

As Craig Sculli was getting ready for the tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar" to come to southeastern Connecticut, he reminisced about Niantic, where his parents still have a home. One of his favorite places in town — both then and now — is the Book Barn. As a kid, he'd always spend time going to the beach and swimming, at Giants Neck Beach and Rocky Neck. And he briefly helped

mold some young East Lyme minds. He had majored in history education at New York University, although he studied acting and voice as well. So, in 2002, when he had a break between jobs, Sculli spent three months substitute teaching in the East Lyme school system. He says, "I know it sounds funny, but I loved substitute teaching."

"It was my very first musical theater score, and I was seriously hooked. And I would sit in my room and listen to it start to finish," he says.

"Jesus Christ Superstar" was, in fact, the reason he became interested in musical theater.

So when he was cast as Pontius Pilate on this tour, he says, "You can imagine the first rehearsal with Ted ... There are still moments onstage where I am down on the ground, looking at Ted, and thinking, 'This is Ted Neeley.' It's a little surreal."

Sculli started with the tour back when it began, in 2006.

"It's a pretty juicy part, and Ted is wonderful to work with. It's been kind of a dream," he says. "It's been exhausting but very satisfying. It's parts of the country I probably never would have seen. It's like a big road trip, with a lot of work."

He knows that audiences come into the show thinking of Pilate as a villain, but he tries to do what the material itself does - show Pilate as more human and more sensitive than people would expect.

"He's almost exactly like all of us. He's just being put in this impossible position," Sculli says.

Right now, the tour is set to end in June.

"It's been a wonderful ride doing this part," Sculli says. "It's going to be really hard ... It's like you become a family. I know it's a cliché, but it's true. It's been three years of my life. It's going to be really hard to leave the part and the people."

Regional

Total 1 images.



Craig Sculli as Pilate, top, and Ted Neeley as Jesus in "Jesus Christ Superstar," tonight through Thursday at the Garde Arts Center in New London.