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## The New Testament rewritten

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### REVIEW

Somewhere between Old Testament and New Age, the rock opera *Magdalene, Woman of Light* makes its home.

The new piece elevates the story of Mary Magdalene past most interpretations, but it's noteworthy for its professional production, talented cast and appealing music by Kama Devi.

The story and lyrics, by Michele Wagner (who also directs) and Susan Griffin, are weaker. A program synopsis promises to guide us, but we should be able to follow the narrative, not easy with what seems mostly an invented story (this critic isn't a theologian, though) and vague lyrics such as "Strong spirit/gentle soul/ wise woman/the lion roars."

The story puts Magdalene as a young woman in Egypt, where she is made a priestess by a character named Mother Wisdom. She ends up in Galilee, where she meets Jesus, they fall in love (instantly), get married and become spiritual leaders on a seemingly equal basis.

If Magdalene anoints Jesus, wouldn't that put her on a higher level than his? How do we reconcile one of the world's leading monotheists marrying and seemingly approving of a pagan priestess?

Devi's music carries past the story, performed by a five-piece band with a harp and Middle Eastern inflections. If not musically, narratively the story feels like a Liz Phair-style response to *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

As Magdalene, Marika Reisberg projects innocence growing toward strength, plus a fine soprano. Natalie Oliver-Atherton as Mother Wisdom brings jazzy riffs and a twinkling personality sorely needed. Benjamin Francis has a fine voice but doesn't do much in an underwritten role for Jesus, while Steven J. Burge brings his likability and fine pipes to a jealous Peter.

### Magdalene, Woman of Light

\* **Grade:** B-

\* **When and where:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday, 5 p.m. Sunday, New Denver Civic Theatre, 721 Santa Fe Drive

\* **Cost:** \$34.50 to \$39.50

\* **Information:** 303-309-3773

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