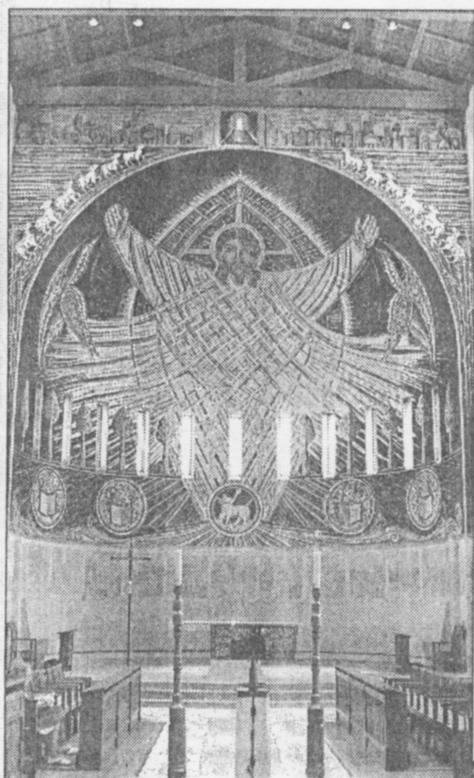


# The Barnstable Patriot

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## The Rock rises majestically in Orleans



Eliot's play staged with spectacle, pageantry

By John Watters  
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The Stages Theater Company's production of T.S. Eliot's pageant play *The Rock*, literally soars heavenward within the majestic confines of the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans.

Written in 1934 for the 45 churches of the Diocese of London, the religious

epic being produced by the Community of Jesus might as well have been written expressly for them by the British poet-playwright in celebration of the fifth anniversary of their basilica-style edifice on Rock Harbor.

With the newly-unveiled, stunning glass mosaic of Jesus as the backdrop, the setting is nothing less than perfect.

Sr. Danielle Dwyer ably directs the story, which centers around three workmen diligently constructing a London church. Although they are met with obstacles along the way: the very marshy condition of the soil on which they are trying to build, pressing deadlines, and whether cash will continue to flow in until the church is complete.

David Haig, Brad Lussier, and Joseph Laraja nicely capture the workmen's English accents and the down-to-earth appearance and style of construction workers. Eliot uses them as the con-

COMMUNITY OF JESUS PHOTO  
**BACKDROP TO THE ROCK** — T.S. Eliot's play *The Rock* is staged this weekend before the newly-completed 2,260-square-foot mosaic at the Community of Jesus on Rock Harbor in Orleans. Tours are held Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 3 p.m., and every evening except Wednesdays at sunset.

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## The Rock rises majestically...

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stant in the ever-changing background of time and realm.

The Rock, a spectral triad portrayed by Chris Kanaga, Vicky Kanaga, and Ellen Ortolani, is a timeless, otherworldly, nebulous council. Abstract in appearance, with a mixture of ancient and futuristic style, they narrate Eliot's work through "moments of time you live where two worlds cross." Perhaps more simply put: heaven and earth.

Throughout the play, we are introduced to characters from the historical past: Israelites, Saxons, assorted British clergy, Nehemiah, even England's most famous church builder Christopher Wren. They help steer the story with a strong religious compass.

The costume design by Sr. Helen Olsen,

Gail Gibson, Betsy Sorensen, and Anne Swidrak is superb, especially the extravagant headpieces. The lighting designs by Sr. Victoria MacNeil are extremely effective.

The true magnificence of the Church of the Transfiguration is the unsurpassed five-and-one-half story acoustical space for the Community's prized musicians and singers to perform in. The eight-piece orchestra accompanied by members of the Glorae Dei Cantore Schola singers gives the play the wings on which it soars.

Although weighty at times, *The Rock* delivers the end results of spectacle and pageantry.

*The Rock* will be performed June Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 8 p.m. at the Church of the Transfiguration on Rock Harbor, Orleans. For tickets (\$30, \$25 seniors, free for those 18 and under), call 508-255-2400.

# Cape Experience

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## Like a rock

### THEATER Review

By Laurie Higgins

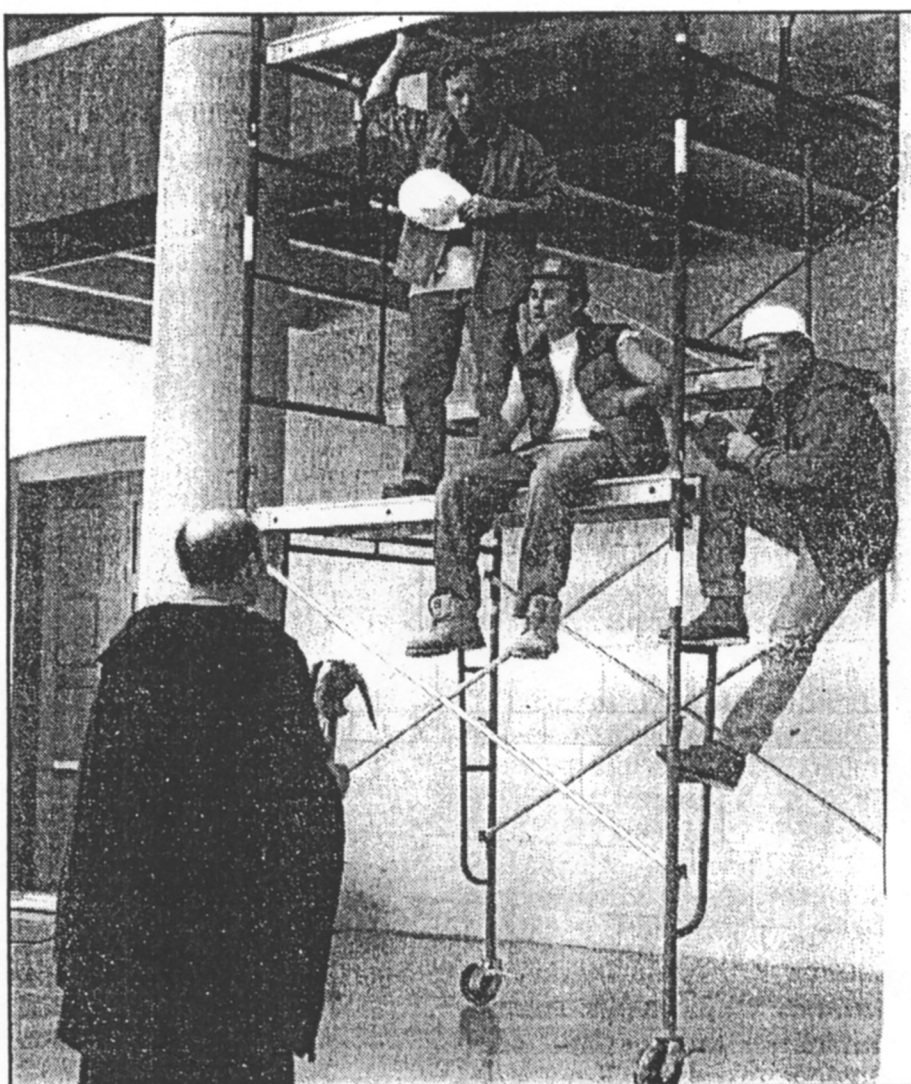
In keeping with their tradition of presenting classic works to illuminate modern circumstances, Stages Theatre Company presents T. S. Eliot's "The Rock," a pageant play originally written and presented for the 45 churches fund of the Diocese of London in 1934. With its story of the joy of building a church, despite the hard work and problems that crop up, the play is a perfect thematic choice for the acting troupe to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Church of the Transfiguration.

The play opens with a six-person chorus speaking both singly and together in perfect unison, questioning the need to build more churches. The chorus leader tells them to pay attention to the wisdom of The Rock. The trinity of The Rock promises to answer their questions.

The central action of the play centers on three London construction workers who debate the need for another church as they struggle to build on swampy ground with impossible deadlines and the threat that their funding will run out.

As they work, the trio is inspired by visitations from ghosts of those in the past who have built churches and fought for the Church through the centuries, until they eventually realize they are doing noble and necessary work, and that despite the obstacles, the work itself is part of God's purpose.

Despite the serious undertones of the theme and plot, this is a lively, colorful and uplifting production that keeps audience members entranced by the sheer beauty of the setting and talent of the performers.



Three workmen building a church in impossible circumstances are inspired by visitations from ghosts in Stages Theatre Company's production of T. S. Eliot's "The Rock."

Danielle Dwyer showcases her amazing range as both a director and dual-role actor. She gracefully switches from being regal, solemn and elegant in the role of the chorus leader to bawdy and uproarious in role of Mrs. Ethelbert. Her song and dance number with stage husband Ethelbert, played by David Haig, is priceless.

As the three modern construction workers, David Haig, Brad Lussier and Joseph Laraja carry on a sometimes hilarious, sometimes serious dialogue with perfect cockney accents and a lively delivery. They are the heart and soul of the play and great fun to watch.

Chris Kanaga, Vicky Kanaga, and Ellen Ortolani play the trinity of The Rock with solemn clarity.

The six actors who make up the chorus — Luke Norman, David Bushnell, Michelle Rich, Ruth Gibson, Mark Bushnell, and Stephen Velie — also play a variety of other roles in the play with equal aplomb. Sarah

Andre's and David Ortolani's choreography is wonderful and cast members execute graceful steps in perfect form. The sumptuous music also adds much to the performance. Eight musicians under the direction of Richard Pugsley and David Chalmers add emotional depth and resonance to the performance and the men's and women's choruses give goosebumps-inspiring performances.

The church as stage works beautifully to bring the play to the present in the appropriately grand finale that highlights the gorgeously sparkling new mosaic apse portraying Christ with arms outstretched ready to welcome all, giving deeper meaning to the final benediction of the oft-repeated chorus, "A church for us all and work for us all and God's world for us all unto this last."