

Roman invasion – all a part of the Easter Play this Saturday

Authentic looking Roman soldiers will bring a sense of danger to the annual Passion Play which will be performed in Edinburgh's Princes Street Gardens West this Saturday.

Soldiers of the Antonine Guard, one of Scotland's leading living history societies, will perform the roles of Roman soldiers in the Edinburgh Easter Play, using authentic costumes and weaponry to bring the threat of Roman occupation to life.

They will join a cast of more than 100 people of all ages and backgrounds who will create the play which is performed in front of the backdrop of Edinburgh Castle.

Director Suzanne Lofthus said: "It's easy to forget that the events of the first Easter took place in an occupied nation. The Roman occupation was brutal and violent. Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross.

"The Antonine Guard have brought a new sense of threat into the play and look magnificent in their Roman costumes and armour. It will truly feel that we are in an occupied nation – sadly something we still understand in the world today."

The Easter Play team has staged a new version of the story in Princes Street Gardens every year since 2005, attracting

crowds of up to 3,000 people.

The Antonine Guard was founded in 1996 to promote awareness of Scotland's Roman heritage, and has taken part in events across the UK and overseas bringing history of life.

John Richardson, one of the founders of The Antonine Guard, said: "This is a great opportunity to bring history alive to the audience who may not be familiar either with the story or with the Romans.

"Although crucifixion was a ghastly deed, the actual Roman soldier was doing just what he had been ordered to do by the State, and we can see this approach even today around the world."

The traditional Passion Play has a twist, however: the part of the Narrator, traditionally played by a man, is being played by Alison Parkinson, in the role of Mary Magdalene.

Parkinson said: "In our version, she is a female disciple, right up there and part of the action. The historical research I've done suggests this is quite correct, there were women who followed and supported Jesus' ministry.

"I hope that having the story narrated by a woman will give a different perspective, and show people that there is a story there for women too."

The first Easter Play was performed in Princes Street Gardens in 2005. Past productions have included a series of monologues by characters on the fringes of the story and a hard-hitting contemporary production set in a near-future Scotland.

In 2021, when Covid-19 restrictions prevented a live performance, the play was redeveloped as an audio play and a series of short films, Scenes from the Passion, made under lockdown conditions, which were watched by 5,000 people online.

The 2022 play, *Hope Rises*, which imagined the story being told by a group of refugees, was one of the first outdoor performances in Edinburgh city centre as restrictions lifted.

The Edinburgh Easter Play is a production of Cutting Edge Theatre. Cutting Edge, which offers training in performing arts for disabled people through its INSPIRE programme, is making this year's production the most inclusive to date with integrated BSL interpretation and audio description.



Pictured on Edinburgh's Calton Hill are Calum Barbour as Christ with Joe Witcombe (left) and Brian Young as Roman legionnaires from The Antonine Guard re-enactment group. Photography – www.colinhattersley.com – cphattersley@gmail.com – 07974 957 388.



Pictured on Edinburgh's Calton Hill are Calum Barbour as Christ with Joe Witcombe (left) and Brian Young as Roman legionnaires from The Antonine Guard re-enactment group with

Alison Parkinson as Mary Magdelene. Photography – www.colinhattersley.com – cphattersley@gmail.com – 07974 957 388.



Pictured on Edinburgh's Calton Hill (and looking towards Princes Street) are Calum Barbour as Christ, with Alison Parkinson as Mary Magdelene, with Joe Witcombe (left) and Brian Young as Roman legionnaires from The Antonine Guard re-enactment group.

Photography for The Easter Play from: Colin Hattersley Photography – www.colinhattersley.com – cphattersley@gmail.com – 07974 957 388.



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