

# DZieCi



“We would like to have wings in order to fly toward God,  
but it is not forbidden even to limp in that direction.”



Dzieci

241 Garfield Pl.  
Brooklyn, NY  
1 1 2 1 5  
718 638 6037

## Mission Statement

Dzieci (djyeh-chee) is an international experimental theatre ensemble dedicated to a search for the “sacred” through the medium of theatre.

Using techniques garnered from such theatre masters as Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook, ritual forms derived from Native American and Eastern spiritual disciplines, and an ethic based securely in Humanistic Psychology, Dzieci aims to create a theatre, which is equally engaged with personal transformation as with public presentation.

Towards this aim, the ensemble balances work on performance with work of service, through creative and therapeutic interactions in hospitals and a variety of institutional settings. Dzieci believes helping others generates a profound healing effect that not only serves the patient but also strengthens the ensemble’s work.

Dzieci is firmly dedicated to process. Our theatrical creations come organically over a long period of time and a relationship with the world around us is essential. Therefore, public demonstrations of the work in progress are offered along the way, along with Para-theatrical workshops, which invite participants to experience the work underlying our most current investigations.

note: “Dzieci” is the Polish word for “Children”.

TOM F. DRIVER  
The Paul Tillich Professor of Theology and Culture Emeritus  
501 West 103<sup>rd</sup> St. #14G  
Union Theological Seminary in New York  
New York, NY 10027

To Whom It May Concern,

The extraordinary theater group which calls itself Dzieci was wholly unknown to me until the ensemble showed up one Sunday morning at the Jan Hus Presbyterian Church in Manhattan in a performance of their "Fool's Mass", so wonderful, so authentic in its combination of the ridiculous and the sublime that it became our mode of worship on that day.

My professional life has been devoted to theater, theology, and the study of ritual. I was astonished by the insight and skill with which Dzieci brought together these concerns, and equally surprised that I had never heard of the group before. I've since learned that they have been involved in a slow process of gestation, so to speak. Only recently are they beginning to emerge from the womb of their formation process to continue their growth in public. They will never be "fully grown," for theirs is a theater of continual discovery and of a kind of growth that is (all at once) moral, spiritual, and aesthetic.

Following my initial experience of Dzieci in performance, I was invited to meet with them in what they like to call a "master class," which means a session in which I share some of my ideas and facilitate their discussion of the group's aims and methods. From the two such sessions we have had so far, I have gained very high admiration for the group's dedication to its work and for its fearlessness in approaching the most complex matters of rehearsal and performance in relation to spiritual process. Through their founding director, Matt Mitler, they have been led to build upon the work of Jerzy Grotowski, than whom there was no greater explorer of this territory in the 20th century. In Mitler, and in Dzieci, fearlessness is combined with a humility of spirit that is rare in theater. For this reason, Dzieci, which means "children", is an apt name for them.

In their own way of thinking, Dzieci is an ensemble devoted to the idea that theater is essentially a form of "communion". It uses theater work to seek an ever greater understanding of what it means to share, to give of oneself in performance. Through six years of what I have called "gestation," the group has formed a core of artisans from dance, directing, music, movement and management. The work of this extraordinary mixture of persons has a strong impact on everyone who participates in it. The effect on an audience is exhilarating and deeply satisfying, as I can testify because I saw their work in performance before I had ever heard of them.

Dzieci's work is very important to the theater. It must be supported. It is uncommon to find theater, which strives to be necessary. Because Dzieci does, it deserves your assistance.

Sincerely,  
Tom F. Driver\*

\*Author: "Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual"



# Creative Interactions

In Dzieci's commitment to service, we make ourselves available for a variety of performances and workshops in hospitals and other institutions. The group has had ongoing relationships with: Manhattan Psychiatric and Rockland Psychiatric Centers, Stony Lodge Hospital, United Cerebral Palsy, Montefiore Medical Center, Cabrini Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation, The Associated Blind, Children's Hope Foundation, The International Rescue Committee, Federation Employment Guidance Services, and Hospital Audiences, Inc.



The Dzieci Creative Interaction is essentially an improvisational, celebratory event. Structured to fit the parameters of space and time, we rely on the group's expertise in clowning, acrobatics, choral singing, and trust exercises to establish a bond with our audience, ultimately empowering them to join in the creative process.

Dzieci has a variety of looks for different occasions: Medieval Fools, costumed in shades of white, singing hymns and chants from the 8th through the 17th centuries; ragamuffin

Kids, in denims and calicoes, singing old spirituals and work songs; an exuberant and colorful family of traveling Gypsies, singing old European folk songs; the absurdly incompetent acrobatic troupe, Cirkus Lunal; and as a variety of buffoons for specially themed parties.

Dzieci's shows are basically non-verbal. This allows for a contact that bridges all cultures and ages, as well as special needs audiences. The ensemble is also available for more intimate creative interaction, as well as walk-around performances and staged presentations for schools, street fairs, private parties, and corporate events, and can appear in any configuration; from duets to the full company.



# Notes to Dzieci From the Kids of Stony Lodge

"Thank you for making me laugh. I thought I was not going to laugh.  
But I did. Thank you from keeping me from depressin'."

"Nobody beats your laughter. Hope you come back soon.  
Bring the little baby along."

"Thank you. I love you very much. I love your show."

"I love your show. And I hope you come back.  
And I want to know how do you do those teeth?"

"Thank you for coming and we had a great time. We enjoyed  
your company. Thanks for chasing us - don't do that no more!  
Thank you for letting us pull your wigs off!  
And thank you for scaring us. We want to do it again!"

"We had so much friends together and so much fun.  
We thank you for coming mostly because  
this is the first time I never argued with anyone!"

"The best part was when we jump off the table  
and into your hands!"

"Thank you very much even though I wasn't playing.  
(From the very quiet girl.)"

"I felt that they were on a boat searching for new land  
and they found us!"

Stony Lodge Hospital is a private residential institution  
for children, adolescents, and adults with psychiatric disorders and dual diagnosis.  
Dzieci has performed there regularly since 1998.





# Notes from Staff

“We were quite impressed by the sensitivity and skill Dzieci demonstrated working with a diverse and challenging population that included children, adolescents, and adults being treated for acute psychiatric disturbances. We were particularly struck by the gentle and creative way in which the group engaged patients, demonstrating respect for ambivalence, mirroring fears, anxiety and sadness, guiding the patients through to a place of connection and healing. Through non-verbal metaphors, a safe space was communicated which allowed heavy defenses to melt and enabled individuals to relate in a more genuine manner.

“Afterwards, patients expressed to myself and other staff members a sense of having felt valued and special. Testimony to how skillfully Dzieci creates bridges between territory that is often isolated, often forgotten. The after effects of your tremendous efforts are very deep, creating a sense of community with both the staff and patients that is often missing”

—Eileen Leith, Activities Director and Art Therapist, Stoney Lodge Hospital

“With your spirit, excitement, and smiles, you always manage to bring a sense of unity within our large groups of families and children. Most of all, you help teach children infected with HIV and AIDS that they can overcome their fears and enjoy themselves. Giving the children a chance to escape and laugh is so valuable when they are faced with so many obstacles.”

—Jonathan Bee, Director of Social and Family Programs, Children’s Hope Foundation

“A most unusual group, Dzieci, delighted and amazed all who attended our celebration with their ‘now-for-something-completely-different’ brand of audience interaction.”

—Catherine M. Fisher, Executive Assistant, Barrier Free Living, Inc.

“I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude for the performance for our drug treatment clients and their children. I was truly touched by the delightful responses, which you elicited, from our audience. You truly helped make our holiday party special.

—Paul Ruchames, CSW, Executive Director, Counseling Service of EDNY

“What else can I say? Wow! Incredible and original. We’ve never seen anything like it.”

—E. McKay, Rehab Tech, Weinberg Mental Health Center

“Every time the group has come to Cabrini Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation, they have provided magical, multi-sensory activities and therapeutic contacts that had a profound impact on residents and staff alike. One such instance that stands out in my mind was when the group physically lifted a disabled resident from her wheelchair and carried her as if she were floating on water. I have been unable to erase that image from my mind; and hope I never forget it. Other residents respond to this work in ways that more traditional supportive techniques are unable to foster.”

—Oscar Correale, CTRS, Director, Therapeutic Recreation, CCNR

“I salute you!!!! Your troupe is fantastic!!!! As a participating audience member at your SVA performance for Art Therapists, I was (and still am) completely blown away by your work. It is both exciting and satisfying to know that there are people who understand the transformational and healing power of theatre in the dramatic context of everyday life.”

—Elissa Bromberg, Art Therapist

# Workshops

The Dzieci Workshop offers an intense and rigorous Para-theatrical experience, which goes far beyond typical barriers of actor and audience. As with our Creative Interactions, the Workshop is essentially non-verbal, with guidance gently provided by the ensemble through sound and gesture. Each workshop begins with a theme based on a current inquiry for the group, and follows in accordance with the nature of the participants as, together, we become a single community.

Past themes have included: *In the Country of the Blind*, where blind and seeing participants worked together in absolute darkness; *Vow of Silence*, with no vocal expression at all; *The Hero's Journey*, employing tribal rites and archetypical narrative; *Breath of Life*, work with Sufi religious forms; and *Circle of Fire*, exploring Native American ritual.

For the company, the workshop is a chance to develop skills of leadership and intuition, strengthening relationships within the company, while extending our process to include others. Depending upon numbers, it may be possible for guests to have individual guides.

Dzieci has been hired to create specially designed workshops for such diverse clientele as: art therapists, theology students, psychiatric staff, youth in crisis, clergy, and actors. Following are a few sample themes available as individual workshops or as a series of classes:

## **Sacred Theatre**

Through physical, vocal, and ensemble exercises, explorations in ritual and ceremony, and vigorous confrontation with personal obstacles, participants will be brought to the axis where theatre and spirituality converge; where attention is strengthened and presence is demanded.  
(This course could culminate in the presentation of group creation.)

## **The Holy Fool**

The Trickster and The Fool are alive within us. Through trust, relaxation, and improvisation, we can discover a practice of service through the healing power of anarchy and laughter.  
(This course could include on site work with children in schools or hospitals.)

## **Art in Service**

The "Gift" is only honored when it is sacrificed to something higher. This workshop is specifically designed for those with a talent, who wish to actively engage the question, "What do I serve?" (This course could culminate in a public offering.)

## **Presence**

Facing a real teacher, we are brought to a place of stillness and attention. Some say we are brought "home". For those who have an aim to be leaders, presence is an essential quality to develop and refine. In this course, we will meticulously study a most illusive and fascinating subject: The Self.  
(This course could include opportunities for participants to demonstrate qualities of leadership through counseling, offering a homily, or officiating a service.)



# Workshop Testimonials

“I wanted to thank all the members of Dzieci for hosting such a wonderful, giving event.

It startled me and awakened me and reminded me of primal places in me  
that I recognized and would like to visit more often.”

-Angela Delichatsios, participant, “Pandemonium”

“My experience totally defies words...it allowed for a sharing and intimacy  
that I find lacking in my day to day. The use of movement and sound  
was transformative on a kinesthetic and visceral level.”

-Lisa Lerner, participant, “The Thunder, Perfect Mind”

“It melted me, humbled, destroyed my ego and pride, ripped my heart open,  
and changed me forever.

-Krystyna Sanderson, participant, “The Hero’s Journey”

“Thanks to you and your beautiful brothers and sisters in Dzieci.

You touch the hearts of all of us.”

Anita Stewart, Vice President, The Heart of the Healer Foundation

“I just wanted to let you know how much we appreciated your individual  
creativity and talent in your work with our Employment Services Division clients.

We know that these clients were energized with the hope that they  
can make positive behavioral changes in their efforts to secure employment.

Again, thank you for your warmth, graciousness,  
and sensitivity to the FECS Health and Human Services clientele”

Bobbi Nathanson, ACSW, Program Manager, FECS

“My colleagues at the Nashville Institute for Clergy Excellence and I offer  
our heartfelt thanks for your collegiality in ministry in sharing your personal  
and professional experience and time with us. We really appreciate your consideration  
and willingness to aid us in our own pastoral and personal development.

Your insights will expand our abilities to minister to those whom we serve.”

The Reverend Victor Singletary, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church

“Inspiring work, excellent execution. Look forward to working with them again.”

“Wonderful non-verbal end to the conference.” “Fucking brilliant!”

From participant evaluations, 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Spirituality and Psychotherapy,  
“Movement and Repose” workshop

“The workshop you conducted for our refugee students was a huge success.

The students really enjoyed the opportunity to express themselves  
through movement and dance. This experience allowed them to connect with  
other refugee youth and helped them build a sense of community with each other.

They rarely have opportunities like the one that you provided.

As you witnessed, the students were excited to be there and had a great time.”

Jill Gleiser, IRC Youth Program

# Performances

All Dzieci performances, once created, remain in repertory and are re-created as a living ritual for the company. The pieces evolve as the company evolves, and there is no end to their development.

Performances are available for touring and can be easily adapted for intimate settings or huge arenas. Dzieci has performed “Fools Mass” for seven hundred screaming teenagers in a High School gymnasium, and for a half dozen humble parishioners in a diminutive Gothic chapel.

We are currently offering two specific programs:

## **Fools Mass**

In this work, a motley group of medieval village idiots are forced to enact their own Mass, due to the untimely death of their beloved pastor.

Though it sounds grim, Fools Mass is full of buffoonery and comic audience participation. This, along with choral singing of sacred hymns and chants from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, combines to create a work, which travels from the ridiculous to the sublime.

## **MaKbet**

Dzieci has been steadily working on a Gypsy retelling of the Shakespearean classic.

For this chamber version of Macbeth, the ensemble has learned all the lines, of every part, through a process of oral transmission, so as to create maximum improvisational possibilities. In rehearsal, as well as production, we do not know who will be playing any given role at any given time.

The show has the impression of being a ritual or ceremony. A very mysterious ceremony. Employing haunting folk songs and chants from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, along with the poetry of Shakespeare’s eternal verse, the company explores, and explodes, the very essence of theatre and storytelling.



**Both Fools Mass and MaKbet can be performed for any audience and can be augmented with Dzieci workshops or seminars.**

# A Note on Process: Working on the Self

In Dzieci, we believe the creative act must, primarily, have a transformative effect on the artist himself. We make no pretensions of altruism. If others are involved in our efforts - as students, audiences, patients, (or even fellow group members) - it is because a relationship with them is a natural extension for us to make in the context of our own development. Ultimately, the only gauge each of us has for measuring the effects of our work is our individual evolution, as artists and as human beings.

What we have found helpful, and in fact a necessity, for our growth, is to follow a process of inquiry. The teachers who have had the most profound influence on Dzieci have also been explorers, venturing forth into the great unknown. They embraced questions. They tackled mysteries: “Who am I? Why am I here? What do I serve?” Their work was to work on themselves. A work of personal transformation.

Theatre serves us as a vehicle for this transformation, but theatre is not our aim. Our aim is to work on ourselves. Such a process is fraught with pitfalls for any single individual. With Dzieci it has only been possible through the cumulative efforts of each member of our community. This collective endeavor does not preclude conflict and struggle – vital work is hard work – but we have found a few guidelines to help keep us in balance.

If there is a way to do something more humanely, more organically, or more adventurously, we make every effort to do so. We utilize oral transmission for learning music and text. We begin and end performances, workshops, hospital visits, and rehearsals in silence. We return to silence often. We do not seek applause. We share meals. We join in work and prayer with sacred communities. We lead non-verbally through action and gesture. We commit to not knowing. We destroy what we create. We wear funny teeth.

For Dzieci, performance ultimately becomes an act of purification. We establish seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and we traverse them. We work on strengthening our attention. We expose our fears. The hymns and chants we sing in our shows are also an integral part of our service work. As we sing at the bedsides of people who may be in pain or dying, the songs become “coated” by the experience, and our relationship to them is forever altered.

Through creative therapeutic encounters, we learn how to relate to others in a more human way. We see a deep contact is possible if we can be more essential, so we strive to strip away layers of personality and habit. Individually, this leaves us vulnerable, so we begin to value, even more, the strength we feel as a group. This strength demands to be tested, so we take our work out to the public. We are all at risk before an audience, where a complex bond can be made that, if we follow our aim, leads us even further towards self-discovery.

Dzieci came into being nine years ago, fueled by the energy of a small group of unique individuals, drawn together to pursue an organic process toward creativity and personal growth. We have made a commitment to each other, and to this vocation, which unfolds endless mysteries. We can tell we are headed on the right path when our work brings us closer to an appreciation of life in all its forms. When this happens, we feel accountable for the work we do. It becomes more than us and we feel responsible to it. When we feel responsible, we sense how much we’ve yet to learn. And we burn to continue.



# Biographies

**Yvonne Brecht**, the force behind the initial creation of Dzieci, was born and raised in Basel, Switzerland. Yvonne worked as a kindergarten teacher before moving to New York in 1994 to pursue a career in theatre. She subsequently played many roles such as Nina in *The Seagull*, Mrs. Popov in *The Bear*, and Electra in *Chytymnestra*. She was also a member of The Irondale Theater Ensemble whose work includes safe sex education and group-building skills for high-risk teenagers in high schools and prisons. Yvonne runs a Music Together program for children, and is blessed with a beautiful dziecko of her own, Ora. She is currently getting her certification as a Feldenkrais instructor.

**Jordon Flato**, a native of Northern California, grew up dwarfed by the shadow of the redwood forests. He entered the world of theatre at an early age, appearing in two to three productions a year from age 11 to 26. Eventually encountering Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski, and finding a more abiding respect for real philosophy, Jordon found what he was truly seeking in this work. He soon quit the theatre all together, in despair of ever finding a company with an emphasis on the 'vertical'. Shortly after (almost) receiving his B.A. in Theatre Arts from San Francisco State University, Jordon and his wife, Lisa, also an actress, moved to New York, where he spent his creative energies on visual art with an eye toward the sacred. It has come as a great shock, and an even greater delight to discover Dzieci, which was what he had been longing for from theatre all along. Most recently, Jordon became the father of his own dziecko, Parker, and is finding fatherhood to be the most rewarding work of all.

**Karen Hatt** (Costumer) is a craft and food stylist by profession although she'd rather be designing and building costumes. For Dzieci she has produced 17th century clerical wear for *Devils*, 15th century idiot wear (a la Breughel) for the company's annual Christmas offering, *Fools Mass*, calico and patchwork costumes inspired by clothes of 19th century slaves and their dolls, for the group's work with children, and the delirious *Cirkus Luna!* outfits for the group's inept acrobatic show. She has now begun construction on Gypsy wear that Dzieci will use in hospitals and for their current adaptation of *Macbeth*.

**Jesse Hathaway**, a product of Catholic education and good parental supervision, was born and reared in the fertile concrete valleys of Los Angeles. He left California for the confines of New York City to attend school at NYU. There, at the Experimental Theatre Wing, he discovered Grotowski, clowning, and physical theatre, and began to realize the potential all encompassing incorporation and inherent sacredness in the Work. After several (mis)adventures in Spain and Canada, he graduated with a BFA in Theatre. By day, Jesse is a mild mannered Art Teacher at a special education facility in New Jersey and a storyteller at a day camp during the summer. He spends a lot of time talking to the plants in his garden, studying medieval philosophy and various forms of divination, learning obscure languages, and listening to music. Jesse is a devotee of the orisha Obatala in the Lukumi religion, drawing upon a deep need to integrate the spiritual with the practical, and is grateful to be in the company of such exemplary people as Dzieci.

**Martha Hoffman's** love for the theater began when she saw her first "real" play, with her eighth grade class, at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. Obsessed with seeing the production as many times as possible, she soon talked her way into an ushering job there. Since then, she's studied Great Books at the University of Chicago, History at Yale, and has written on the creative process, the traveler as storyteller, and the early modern Spanish court. Storytelling has always been central to Martha's work as a writer, teacher, and actor: the ability to hear, experience, and enter into other people's stories is, for her, the heart of human compassion and understanding. Before joining Dzieci, her favorite theater experience was learning the role of Feste (*Twelfth Night*) in one day when a cast member dropped out on opening night.

**John Norman** (Music Director) hails from Detroit, where he earned his BA in Performing Arts at Oakland University. He has taught vocal technique and acting to all ages and levels, and has played lead roles in several critically acclaimed regional productions such as *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Othello*, and *Angels in America*. A performer since age three, John has also recorded five albums with four different ensembles, the latest being his folk-rock outfit, “Norman.” A descendant of the Eastern Cherokee Tribe, John finds that his focus on ritual and spirituality is deeply related to this important part of his heritage. He and his wife Rebecca are raising two little *dziekos* of their own. John manages Ripley/Grier Studies where Dzieci is now theatre in residence.

**Rebecca Sokoll**, a native of the Detroit area, began studying dance when she was three years old. She continued to hone her performance skills at several professional theatres in the area, appearing in such productions as Meadow Brook Theatre’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (“Best Play”, Detroit Free Press), and the performance-art masterpiece, *The Moon Wolf*, at Ann Arbor’s Performance Network. Her New York credits include *Chronicles of Hell*, produced by Theatre Et Al for the NYC Fringe Festival. Rebecca is currently working to complete her B.A. in Psychology at Hunter College. She and her husband, Dzieci chorusmaster John Norman, are the proud and adoring parents of Jack, who made his debut in Fools Mass 2005 at Cathedral St. John the Divine, age 9 days, and Isaac, who hopes to appear in this years fools mass.

**Bob Stroock** (Music Coordinator) was born and raised amid the corn and soybean fields of Pontiac, Illinois, and has a BA in Sociology from the University of Chicago, where he directed productions of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Twelfth Night*. His previous acting credits include Edmund in *King Lear*, Pseudolus in *Forum*, and Jack Boyle in *Juno & the Paycock*. He has also performed in a number of vocal and early music ensembles. Bob is currently in the process of developing the scenarios and music for *Ragnarök*, a distantly future Dzieci adaptation of the Nordic Myths, and is pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at New School University.

**Matt Mitler** (Company Director) was initially trained in Humanistic and Existential Psychology, and Group Process, before discovering the healing potential of theatre. He considers his therapeutic study with such notables as R.D. Laing and Carl Rogers to be equal to his theatrical study with Jerzy Grotowski and The Polish Theatre Laboratory. Combining these two pursuits, he began to lead workshops in a variety of settings including Hutchings Psychiatric Center (NY); The National Theatre School of Sweden; and the graduate school of The University of Psychology of Warsaw, where his essay, “Art and Therapy” was published in the anthology, *New Directions in Psychotherapy*.

Matt has designed and directed more than 50 theatrical productions, including his adaptation of Nathaniel West’s *Miss Lonely Hearts* for the 29th St. Repertory Theatre; the musical *Sofrito*, featuring The Latin Legends All Stars, for The New Victory Theater; and the apocalyptic epic *Dirty Money* (also co-author) for Teatr Am Turm in Germany. He has also staged the works of solo performers and comedy troupes at such NYC venues as The Samuel Beckett, LaMama, and The Public Theatre.

Featured in over a dozen forgettable B motion pictures, Matt eventually began creating his own film projects, producing half a dozen cult videos including the Shakespearean parody, *MacBeth, King of Scotland. Cracking Up*, his first film feature (producer, director, writer, editor, and actor), garnered many awards including, “Best Film” in The Venice International Film Festival Critic’s Week, and “People’s Choice” in the New York Underground Film Festival. Participating in the festival circuit brought Matt back to Europe for the first time in fifteen years, where he had the good fortune to be sponsored by The Children’s Cancer Fund of Sweden to train an ensemble of actors in clowning and therapeutic technique and to lead seminars in creativity and healing at the Umea School of Medicine.

For Mr. Mitler, Dzieci represents the total synthesis of a work and study that now spans over three decades. He and Dzieci are profiled in *Working on the Inside: The Spiritual Life Through the Eyes of Actors* by Retta Blaney.

# Testimonials

“The lovely singing voices help give a quality of holiness that lets parts of this performance really ring of simple souls reaching for the divine. Those with open minds and a spiritual bent will find a great deal of beauty in Fool’s Mass.”

Anthony Nelson, NY Theatre.com

---

Dzieci is a wonderful example of the spiritual intensity possible when theatre engages the age-old mysteries of faith and the human experience. We at the Cathedral found the very stones our monumental building coming alive through their presence.

Canon Tom Miller, Canon of Arts and Liturgy  
Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York City

---

“Devils of Loudun” was fantastic! I was taken. I recognized a brilliant and sympathetic interweaving of late medieval, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist elements. Because I was so impressed, I asked them to participate in our Brooklyn Interfaith Service of Remembrance for 9/11. They developed a very simple yet moving ritual of candles and prayer in which the whole audience was able to participate.

I don’t know any other group, which combines music, drama, dance, and spirituality in the way that they do. Twice now my wife, and I have attended their productions. They are powerful, risky, and literally healing.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter, Pastor, Old First Reformed Church

---

As Vicar priest for the Latino Community at Grace Church, I had the good fortune to be present when the group performed their annual Christmas offering, “Fool’s Mass”, in my chapel. I found the piece to be complex and delightful and told the group that I felt all priests should experience this rich theatrical creation.

Rev. Mario A. Martinez, Mission San Pablo, Catolica Espiscopal

---

I was genuinely moved by your performance. You do indeed capture something that’s probably inside all of us, that feels vulnerable... and with it, our resilience.

Retta Blaney, The National Catholic Reporter

---

I want to thank you most genuinely for joining us as our special guests. There was really a spirit of holiness, which you brought - the holiness of humility, simplicity, heartfulness, helpfulness, and (of course) sweet love of God. You helped to open people’s hearts to receive the blessings of a communal celebration of the sacred Shabbat.

Rabbi Burt Segal, The Shul of New York at Angel Orensantz

---

Thank you so very much for traveling to this end of the world to share with our parish the “Fools Mass”. You are wonderful! It was a special opportunity for us to embrace our humanity and see our ritual from a child-like perspective. As a community, we proclaim “all are welcome” and you have helped us in our lived experience to realize what that might mean. You are a gift – thank you for sharing!

Michele Harris, St. Francis de Sales Parish

---

“I’m very thankful for having met you; the way you live, and work, and know yourselves is a big lesson for my life! You don’t need words, because you act and show love, compassion, interspirituality, poverty, joy...

God bless you!

Ines Castel-Branco, author and presenter, Parliament of the World’s Religions 2004



# From the Encyclopedia of Religion

The notion of theatre as religious ritual has become more explicit for many of Grotowski's successors. Most notably, Peter Brook has acknowledged the inspiration of Gurdjieff (1888-1949), a major influence for Grotowski, and whose spiritual quest in turn was inspired by yogans and dervishes and employed physical movement and music. Brook, with his inter-cultural troupe of performers, has turned increasingly to an exploration of religious themes, including performance adaptations of Sufi poetry and a spectacular dramatization of the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata* (1985). His 1998 production, *Je suis un Phénomène*, about a Russian mnemomist, implied (according to the *London Times*) "that the brain remains unknowable and exists in relation to yet more imponderable issues to do with friendship, God and death." (Quoted in Moffit)

Indeed, the intensity of such work necessitates the formation of quasi or actual religious communities of performers who often abandon the role of "entertainer" in favour, not merely of improving of technical skills, but also finding an absolute immediacy of the performing gesture in a quest for a transcendent awareness.

One such troupe, *Dzieci*, (Polish for 'children') founded by Grotowski disciple, Matt Mitler in 1997, is "dedicated to a search for the "sacred" through the medium of theatre." Carrying this idea to pastoral lengths, it regularly visits patients in hospitals where moments of non verbal interaction result in therapy for the patient, learning for the performer, and transcendent awareness for both. In the course of developing a theater project inspired by Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, the *Dzieci* troupe more or less stumbled upon the idea of creating a Fool's Mass which has become its signature piece, performed repeatedly in various church settings, including New York City's Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, and also at the off-Broadway theatre, La Mama ETC. The performers wear the vestments, not of priests but of medieval bedlam idiots who are called upon by circumstance to celebrate a Mass even though they do not know how. Moving easily between the sublime and the ridiculous, drawing its audience through laughter toward participation and contemplation, the work resists being categorized as either theater or religion, becoming both at once in an event experienced by many as transformative. As they stand beside these grotesque characters in prayer, worshipers begin to participate in the liturgy with new understanding.

Article by Rex Deverell,

The Encyclopedia of Religion, Macmillan Publications 2005





<http://dziecitheatre.org>