

This past Christmas season, Dzieci presented two performances of *Fools Mass* for underserved communities. These performances were made possible through a grant from The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Fund for the Study and Practice of Christian Mysticism, administered by the Friends World Committee for Consultation, and through the generosity of Rev. Daniel Meeter and Old First Reformed Church. The performance noted below was for special needs adults in cooperative housing, and included Garfield Manor, which Dzieci has been in relationship with for the past fifteen years.

Dzieci's signature piece, *Fools Mass*, has touched wildly diverse audiences from Franciscan nuns to physically and mentally challenged adult communities, in locations spanning from Lake Erie to Barcelona. The piece continues to be not only a blessing for those who witness it, but also for those of us in Dzieci who have the privilege of presenting it.

A Note on Fools Mass

I am writing to compliment Theatre Group Dzieci on its remarkable performance of *Fools Mass*, which I attended on Saturday, December 10, 2011 at Old First Reformed Church in Brooklyn. As good theater for all audiences, the show worked on many levels to engage a variety of people: the slapstick and physical theater kept all of our attention and the layered narrative gave audience members something to mull over long after we left the church. I am thinking especially of the double meaning of "Mary" stealing the loaf of bread, the host, by putting it under her skirt. With the loaf over her belly, "Mary" appeared pregnant with baby Jesus. This small scene operated as a double exposure, two photographic images superimposed on one another. Does this tableau represent Mother Mary, pregnant with the Son of God, or a hungry, disabled woman with stolen bread under her dress? Is the host bread that nourishes the body or Christ who comforts the soul? Which is more important, the physical or the spiritual? Survival or the sacred? Bread or soul? This play holds room for them all.

The show asks, "Must we choose between these 'Marys'? Aren't we all 'Children of God', vulnerable beings struggling to take care of what is most important to us? Aren't we all waiting for 'Father' to arrive, whomever or whatever 'Father' might be for us? Aren't we all perpetually having to muddle through when fate interferes with 'his' arrival?" Like Mary, we are all "expecting", waiting for our savior to arrive, pregnant with possibility, on the verge of relief, or will it be disappointment? We are all in the stairwell, in the pipeline, anticipating what awaits us. For this audience member, *Fools Mass*, with a nod to Beckett, begs the question, "How do we, as people, manage when our "God"---our leader, our guide---does not show up?" Left to our own devices, what do we make in the vacuum? How do we connect with one another in a way that creates the thing we are missing? How do we climb out of our despair and disappointment and relate in order to make a world with our fellows? How do we go on when our hearts are broken?

I think Theatre Group Dzieci gives us a fine answer: through enacting communal rituals, like Mass or theater or breaking bread with others, we embody the thing we've been waiting for. Thank you, Dzieci, for this transporting and transforming theatrical experience.

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