

**1 Q: You have said the show isn't a parody, so how would you describe Fools Mass?**

Fools Mass, as with all works in Dzieci Theatre, began with a question. In this instance, because we were developing a larger piece that took place in the Church in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, the question was: *How do we understand this ritual of the Mass?* But there is always a question under the question, and that question informs our process entirely: *How do we find humanity through the act of creating theatre?*

Initially we developed this piece with a practical concern. So in order to explore the Mass, we decided to approach it with complete innocence, with no understanding whatsoever, certainly with no dogma, and since we were already exploring early choral music, this led to the idea of village idiots. Of particular interest for me is the stripping away of everything possible in order to reveal what is essential. I have no idea what that might be, I am only searching. If I had a plan, an attitude, a judgment even, this would indeed be a parody, but in this process I only have the question. The fact that Fools Mass remains in Dzieci's repertory for over twenty years says something about the value of this question, and the impenetrable depth of the piece.

But in describing Fools Mass, I like to refer to this reference:

*"Moving 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."* - The Encyclopedia of Religion

**2 Q: Why do you think many of the venues that present Fools Mass are actual Church congregations? What do these communities appreciate about this show?**

We seem to have attracted many religious and spiritual communities, to our all of work, not only to Fools Mass. Initially, we were terrified to present this piece to religious orders, but we knew we had to. We had to confirm if what we were doing actually had substance to it, or if it would be seen as disrespectful. The response was, and remains, absolutely awe-inspiring. We had the same concerns verifying Fools Mass before groups who were mentally and physically disabled. And we received an equally affirming response.

Perhaps those who are deeply in question, resonate to our work. Perhaps our work assists a deeper resonance with those who witness it. It unquestionably has this effect on us.

**3 Q: Fools Mass seems like a fun time with lots of thought and consideration. What was the creative process like for this play?**

We do have fun, but one of our guiding rules is to include the totality of our lives in this work. So, if someone in the company is suffering, if they've lost a loved one, if they feel imbalanced or unmoored, it is all part of the work. Just as Fools Mass moves fluidly from the ridiculous to the sublime, so does our rehearsal process. And the process never ends, we work the show anew every season, and every performance. We have deep discussions, and also practice in silence. We meet with renowned theologians, and with infamous clowns. We go on retreat to a Benedictine Abbey, and perform a group striptease in a burlesque show.

**4 Q: What are your goals for audiences to take away after seeing Fools Mass?**

Our goals are fundamentally self-serving in that we do this work for our own potentiality. But there is something intensified when an audience enters the equation and we have great respect for that. Dzieci is a community. The hope is that, when we gather with the public, a greater community is created. We wish to serve, in whatever way, a movement towards a more integrated experience. Something that doesn't necessarily fade away as we exit.

**5 Q: The songs are masterfully performed in at least three languages. How and why did you and your music director choose these songs?**

In the original company was a young man, Gary Hess, who was an early music scholar and an accomplished musician. I already had a great fondness for sacred choral music, which I'd encountered in certain esoteric studies, and found the act and art of harmonizing to be an extraordinary ensemble practice. But Dzieci is also a school, so part of the process is an incessant training, singing included. And for all my love of music, I couldn't sing for shit in the beginning. But now our performances are filled with gorgeous choral music. With Fools Mass, we upgrade the score as we find better choices and as our abilities increase. But what we are always looking for is the way the piece moves us, the emotional effect of the harmonies.

A core principle in our work is service, and we prepare ourselves with signing, by bringing our music to the sick and dying. For years, we've traveled to hospitals and other institutions, often gathering at a patient's bedside to quietly sing a hymn. This isn't about performance; there is no room for that, and it can be excruciatingly self-revealing, but we persist and something new begins to arise. There have been so many profound experiences and every one of them acts upon the song in such a way that it becomes layered with ineffable qualities.