



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NYC's Experimental Shakespeare Company forms Study Group**

The **Dark Lady Players** are transforming our understanding of the meaning of the Shakespearean plays, why they were written, and how they should be performed. Yes, we admit we are Shakespeare nerds. Our work is intense, complex and difficult. Those without a deep Shakespeare background will not appreciate it. We perform the allegorical meaning of the plays, not the surface text. We have a long drawn out process. It takes years. We are working towards several new demonstration productions.

We are forming a Study Group this fall. Those who will benefit from it will normally have a degree in theater and conservatory training from RADA or LAMDA or the equivalent. We will be looking at *Othello* and *Romeo & Juliet*. The purpose is to use the scholarly literature to penetrate beneath the surface into what is really going on in the play. Admission is by interview. If you are interested in joining, come and see some samples of our work. <http://nytheatre.com/prodpage.aspx?s=13272> Free tickets available at the door. *Shakespeare's Gospel Parodies* has 7 performances at West Park church from 11-25 September 2011.

*"This is life changing, if you love Shakespeare"* (David Reck, Actor)

We are definitely **not** Shakespeare in the Park. We do not perform to the lowest common denominator, nor do we try to appeal to the "masses". Our ideal audience member is a professor of theater, someone who studied English at Cambridge or is a former member of a dedicated Shakespeare company -- or maybe just someone who is very good at solving puzzles. Yes, we are elitist. But that is the way it was in Elizabethan England. Most people just saw the honeyed surface of the verse and only a few, **"the wiser sort"** saw through to what the plays actually mean. That is the audience we appeal to. Our work is intended to make people think, make them engage in dialogue and learn to read between the lines in a way that even literary scholars are no longer taught to do.

Shakespeare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to develop its own styles and conventions. Today, as the English language has changed, and as people no longer comprehend the allusions to the classics, the Bible, theology, Roman history, 17<sup>th</sup> century personalities and so on, the Shakespearean plays are becoming increasingly hard to follow. Furthermore, it can no longer be taken for granted that even highly educated and cultured members of the urban elites necessarily have much if any familiarity with the

plays at all, let alone the scholarly literature. Added to this lack of familiarity is the problem of the 400 year old language—which in many productions, especially in the States, is not even well articulated and is presented using the conventions of realism. Perhaps in the future seeing a play “cold” without preparation and reading beforehand, will seem as antique as watching opera without sub-titles. Ideally this preparation should include adaptations which highlight the underlying allegories. This is perhaps a kind of educational theater that may never replace conventional productions, but which can educate an audience in the underlying meanings of the play.

The **Dark Lady Players** construct an original performance piece from existing media: the Shakespeare canon, source materials, and literary and historical analyses. Our goal is to perform a de- and then re-constructed version of the play using all of the form and content at our disposal: a mash-up. The philosophy of ‘camp’ is incredibly important in our construction process because it provides enormous freedom on stage, encompassing parody, asides, and a mash-up of established performance styles from oratory to kitchen sink drama. And Camp is best known for the self-conscious performances on the part of the actors, as in Elizabethan meta-theater. We often present the material as plays-within-plays or spontaneous rehearsals in which actors arrive on stage as Actors who then must sort through the material they are required to perform. This framing structure allows an actor to ‘break character,’ return to her base character of Actor and provide commentary on the script or ask questions about the confusing stuff. We see actors make choices in the moment...we see them pull costumes from a box and hang signs on the wall, a physical manifestation of the layers of meaning we are attempting to show.

In our current show *Shakespeare’s Gospel Parodies* we are using a “museum theater” format, in which the actors form tableaux, each being a scene from a play. The docents will introduce the tableau and sometimes interrupt it. The actors will then perform like a ‘speaking picture’. The show has collected together 9 examples of instances in the plays that parody events in the life of Jesus. They are arranged like a museum exhibit around a 17,000 sq foot church building. The Shakespeare plays contain 14 resurrections, 12 Apocalypses, 5 Virgin Mary Allegories, 3,000 additional religious references, a variety of Christ figures and were written using 14 different translations of the Bible. And yet none of the plays end in Paradise. Why do the Marys (Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona) die before giving birth to the savior? Why are the Messiah figures (Laertes, Shylock, Bottom/Pyramus) defeated?

We offer a radical new solution to this question. These parodies resemble those in Jewish/Marrano literature and suggest that the author of the plays may not have been William Shakespeare but England’s only Jewish poet of the time. This was the subject of a cover article <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1584> last summer in *Reform Judaism* magazine. For further information visit the **Theater** section of this website or email [Darkladyplayers@aol.com](mailto:Darkladyplayers@aol.com)