

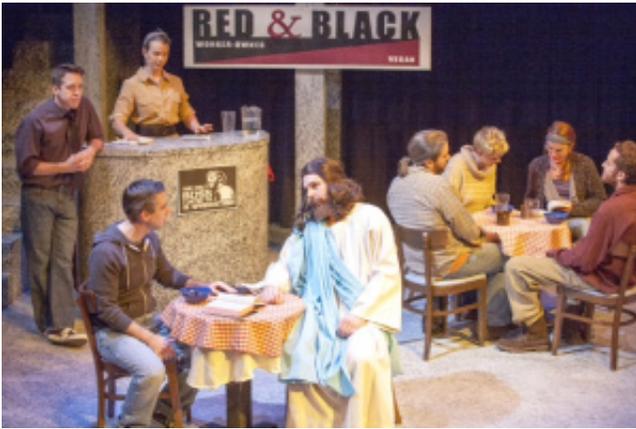
# Stage Door St. Louis

Theatre News Around St. Louis

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## So Many Jesi- So Little Time As Mustard Seed Brings “Imaginary Jesus” To The Stage

November 18, 2012



(<http://stagedoorstl.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/mustardseedjesus01e.jpg>)

Matt and Imaginary Jesus have a chat in a Communist Cafe early in Mustard Seed Theatre's production of "Imaginary Jesus."

For those growing up Catholic- or in any religious home for that matter- the concept of praying to Jesus to forgive our sins, heal our wounds, help us pass tests and so on and so forth was just a matter of course. But what if those prayers weren't answered? Is it really true that all prayers are answered but sometimes the answer is "no?" Or are you praying to the "wrong" Jesus? So goes the premise for Matt Mikalatos' book- "Imaginary Jesus"- which has been adapted by Mustard Seed Theatre's Artistic Director, Deanne Jent, for the stage.

Matt- since this is somewhat autobiographical- opens the play but there are two of him. So Chad Morris takes on the role of "narrator" Matt while Robert Thibaut plays the "real" Matt on his quest for his own personal Jesus. The reason for this quest? Well, Matt's son has died and he wants to know why Jesus has allowed this to happen. So he runs into Pete, played with a flair for the role by J. Samuel Davis. When Matt realizes that his new friend can see his personal embodiment of Jesus unlike anyone else in the "real" world, he discovers that Pete is really Peter, the Apostle. So Pete takes Matt into a wild and unlikely adventure to find the real Savior among all of the imaginary

Jesi (or Jesuses) out there.



<http://stagedoorstl.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/mustardseedjesus08e.jpg>

Matt and Matt (Robert Thibaut and Chad Morris) confront each other during “Imaginary Jesus” at Mustard Seed Theatre.

Meanwhile, Matt’s personal Jesus, played with a comic turn by Justin Ivan Brown, is hurt but understands that He can’t really answer the many questions Matt has from a truly theological standpoint. So we meet Motorcycle Jesus, Barrister Jesus, Hippie Jesus and a “host” of others along the way. We even run into a talking donkey, Daisy, played with uncanny realism by Michelle Hand and even Barrack Obama, given a deft portrayal by Kyle Powell. Julie Venegoni is terrific as Matt’s wife while Nicole Angeli also shines as his sometimes confidant. All the while, Morris and Thibaut deliver a powerful twosome as the dueling Matts working in tandem like a well-oiled machine.

An outstanding supporting cast change costumes and identities throughout to give us several versions of Jesus as well as other notables along the way including a nice performance by Amy Loui as Mary. Her sequence turns this almost Monty Python-esque journey a bit more serious as Matt perhaps finds his way. Maybe not to the “real” Jesus but at least to some comfort with his “imaginary” Jesus. It’s a wild ride that takes the audience on a- some may say blasphemous- but a dandy escape into a surreal world that may change your idea of religion forever.



<http://stagedoorstl.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/mustardseedjesus10e.jpg>

Robert Thibaut as Matt comforts his wife, played by Julie Venegoni in Mustard Seed Theatre's production of "Imaginary Jesus."

Deanna Jent has directed this lovely little story with style and panache. You can't help but fall in love with this zany cast of Jesi and those searching for the truth. Dunsai Dai has created an unbelievable two level set that represents the Oregon wilderness above and a multiple set of rolling triangles and moveable staging that transforms us into various real and unreal sections of Matt's world below. The Michael Sullivan lighting design adds to the wonder and the hilarious series of costumes and beards by JC Kracijek keep the marvelous feeling flowing in the right direction.

You may not get "awe-struck" by "Imaginary Jesus," but you'll have a lot of fun, laughs and thought-provoking moments along the way. This madcap journey plays through December 2nd at Mustard Seed Theatre at Fontbonne University. Give them a call at 314-719-8060 or get online at [www.mustardseedtheatre.com](http://www.mustardseedtheatre.com) for tickets or more information. You don't want to miss this one.

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## Two Powerful Actresses Help WEPG's "This Wide Night" Give Power To An Extended One-Act

November 12, 2012



(<http://stagedoorstl.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/wepgwidenightprints07e.jpg>)

Jane Abling and Rachel Hanks share a pizza and conversation during "This Wide Night" at West End Players Guild. Photo credit: John Lamb.

This Chloe Moss drama is really a character study about two women who shared a prison cell and are both trying to cope with the outside world- and each other- in the squalor of a London tenement. Thanks to two great performances, "This Wide Night" transcends its simple premise and gives us a raw, gritty look at two lost souls as brought to us by West End Players Guild.

Marie, the younger of the two women, has been out of prison for a while. Intruding her uneasy life