

Bridge Street Theatre, Catskill,, NY  
**Discord, The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy,**  
by Scott Carter. Directed by Carmen Borgia.  
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

**“A distillation of true trinity.”**

Discord, now on stage at Bridge Street Theatre in Catskill, New York, is an intellectual exercise in history, religion, politics and literature. Three men, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens, and Count Leo Tolstoy, on their deaths, are assigned to a barren room in limbo where they meet (an unlikely situation in life), converse and ultimately arrive at the conclusion that they have been given the task of rewriting the Gospel, the latter book of the Bible. As collaborators they are an awkward crew. As new friends they are an impossible trio. As characters in Scott Carter's excellent play, they are fascinating. They enter the room in the order of their deaths: Jefferson in 1826 at age 83, Dickens in 1870 at age 58, Tolstoy in 1910 at age 82. Dickens, the youngest of them, has the most energy, vigor and super-ego. Tolstoy as a symbol of new Russia born of old Russia is the most laid-back and Jefferson, as an American aristocrat, is the most opinionated. As they discuss life, work, career and viewpoints they become awkward friends and take up the task at hand with a combination of reluctance and humility, confidence and distractions. The play is talky and the talk is compelling.



Jason Guy as Dickens, Zach Curtis as Tostoy, Brian Linden as Jefferson; Photo: John Sowle

Director Carmen Borgia has not allowed these chatterboxes to bore us. He keeps them on the move and their physicality makes them more than human; they are super-human. Each has his own way of looking at the same things. Each uses words to win-over the others. They do not argue, they discuss. They do not merely discuss, they disclaim. Carter has created scenes in which the trio merely pace the room they are stuck in by whatever force controls them post-mortem. They are not sure where they are or how they are to operate. So we are not sure either and this makes for compelling theater as the three become acquainted, express themselves specifically and become the most unlikely team of collaborators ever in the history of mankind.

Tolstoy, played by Zach Curtis is aware of the other two and their many, varied accomplishments. As a product of the Russian revolution, he is politically an observer of



Zach Curtis, Jason Guy; photo: John Sowle

to present a man we admire but ultimately don't like at all. The character's ego (a word I rarely use) is over the top outrageous and his loud pronouncement provide most of the comedy in this play.

Brian Linden plays Jefferson as a modest man, self-satisfied with his life and his accomplishments, unafraid of truths he would rather not share (Sally Hemings, for example) but who will talk about such things if he is compelled. He is ultimately put into that position and Linden suffers through the most embarrassing parts of Jefferson's life with simplicity and sincerity. Of the three actors in this play he gives the most likable performance for its simplicity.

This difficult play is given a simple, straight-forward production which works well for it. It is a play you need to listen to, for its stated goal is not what the play is about. It touches on more things than we expect and it touches us in more more places than we hoped for.

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changes; he does not make them, nor does he want to do so. But he still has the capacity to dominate when it is necessary. Curtis is a large man who plays his values carefully and succinctly. He never overplays a word or a moment. His size and his voice give him instant authority and he uses this to the best advantage. As a speaking character he is primarily a reactor to what is said by the other two. But he always makes his point.

Dickens is played by Jason Guy who deliver a superb portrait of the extreme egotist that is Charles Dickens. The author of fourteen books was an actor and Guy pulls off both the ego and the acting style of the mid-nineteenth century as Dickens makes his unending statements about everything of concern to them all. Guy uses his voice and his physical posturing



Jason Guy, Brian Linden; Photo: John Sowle

**Discord, The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy, plays at Bridge Street Theatre, 44 West Bridge Street, Catskill, New York, through November 24. For information and tickets go to [bridgestreettheatre.org](http://bridgestreettheatre.org).**

