

***THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THOMAS JEFFERSON, CHARLES DICKENS  
AND COUNT LEO TOLSTOY: DISCORD***

FEATURING **LARRY CEDAR, DAVID MELVILLE AND ARMIN SHIMERMAN**  
WRITTEN BY **SCOTT CARTER**  
DIRECTED BY **MATT AUGUST**

**OPENS TONIGHT (OCTOBER 15, 2014)**  
**EXTENSION ANNOUNCED – NOW THROUGH NOVEMBER 23**  
**IN THE AUDREY SKIRBALL KENIS THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE**

**LOS ANGELES** (October 15, 2014) – The Geffen Playhouse production of *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*, opens tonight, October 15, 2014 in the Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater at the Geffen Playhouse. Written by **Scott Carter**, executive producer and writer for **Bill Maher's Politically Incorrect** and *Real Time*, this whip-smart philosophical comedy features **Larry Cedar** (*Deadwood*, PBS's *Square One TV*), **David Melville** (Travel Channel *Lawrence of America*, film *Ironclad*) and **Armin Shimerman** (Quark on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, Associate Artistic Director at The Antaeus Company) and will be again helmed by director, **Matt August** (Broadway *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*). Due to popular demand, the production has extended now through November 23.

Produced at the NoHo Arts Center last January to rave reviews, this new comedy is based on the historical fact that Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens, and Leo Tolstoy all wrote, or re-wrote their own versions of the Bible. "Funny and thought-provoking. Carter knows a thing or two about lively, accessible formats for the engagement of ideas," said Philip Brandes in the *Los Angeles Times*. "Imagine the dramaturgical love-child of Steve Allen's *Meeting of Minds* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*."

A founding father, a Victorian novelist and a Russian revolutionary walk into a ... stop me if you've heard this one. Thomas Jefferson (yes that one), Charles Dickens (the very same) and Count Leo Tolstoy (who else?) are brought together in a blistering battle of wits for the ages. Examine what happens when great men of history are forced to repeat it.

Carter had the first inspiration for *Discord* in June 1986 when he had a near-fatal asthma attack. After a weeklong hospital stay he said he "experienced an epiphany like Scrooge on Christmas morning going from cynical comedian to non-affiliated deist. I entered into a bliss state, which is a not uncommon phenomenon. I loved all that I met and forgave any previous transgression done to me. It was the most vital extended experience of my life. It lasted about a week."

"I wanted to permanently become the better man that I had been during that time. So I began a spiritual journey, making a pledge to the universe that I would henceforth consider anyone who wanted to talk with me about God, have me read their literature or attend a ceremony."

Carter learned that in 1804 President Thomas Jefferson took a razor and cut out from a King James Bible the verses he liked from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Carter said, "his audacity in condensing Holy Scripture was compounded by what he edited out." Jefferson named his resulting volume "The Philosophy Of Jesus of Nazareth." Then, in 1819, while retired at Monticello, Jefferson produced a sequel called "The Life And Morals Of Jesus Of Nazareth." For this more elaborate work, he bought Bibles in Latin, Greek, French and English. He then devised this new book into four columns so one could follow his expanded chronicle of Christ in a single language by reading down or, by reading across, scan a verse in a quartet of tongues.

Carter said, "This story increased my fascination for Jefferson: what modern president would hatch such an idea and then spend his White House evenings executing it?"

Carter also saw the great English actor Alec McCowen perform his one-man show of the unabridged St. Mark's Gospel – further reinforcing that there might be a stage piece out of this material.

Ten years later, Carter found *The Life of Our Lord* by Charles Dickens. It turns out that Dickens, too, had written a gospel – for his children and, as Carter said, "He included all of the miracles that Jefferson's razor had cut out. There was a play: the two of them debate their visions of Christ." Later Carter found Stephen Mitchell's *The Gospel According To Jesus* only to discover that Leo Tolstoy had also abridged the gospels. So the debating duet became a trio.

Carter called his friend, Garry Shandling, and said, "I've been writing a play for 20 years that I've never told you about. Could I come over to your house and just read it? I had brought over three little sticks. On them were the heads of Jefferson, Dickens and Tolstoy. I was halfway through the text when Garry said, 'Let's stop and talk about what we've heard so far.' And he gave me 23 pages of great notes. And it was late so he said, 'Do the rest tomorrow night.' So, like Scheherazade. I finished it the next night and got another rounds of notes."

After a re-write, the next reading was at Norman Lear's house. Present were Stephen Mitchell, who introduced Carter to the Tolstoy Bible, Stephen's wife, author Byron Katie, and Carter's wife, Bebe. "Afterwards, Stephen asked for a copy of the script. I got it returned in the mail a couple of weeks later with a set of annotations. Which prompted another re-write." Then Carter asked if Mitchell would send a script to Elaine Pagels, the Princeton Religious Studies professor who wrote *The Gnostic Gospels* (which is better known under its alternate title, Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*). And a short time later, Carter received another annotated script.

Over the course of several years, Carter did 50 different readings, and 200 drafts until the first full production of the play in 2014 at the NoHo Arts Center.

Carter is philosophical about what he has learned. In 1776, young slave-owner Thomas Jefferson asserted, in his Declaration of Independence, the, "self-evident," truth that all are "created equal," and endowed by God "with certain unalienable rights," including "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Carter said, "Jefferson's words sparked a revolution. After which, he became our Ambassador to France, just before their Revolution, which devolved into the Reign of Terror, which was described in *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. Dickens became the favorite novelist of young Leo Tolstoy."

Tolstoy's success as a novelist prompted a suicidal depression, which launched a spiritual journey, which culminated with his assertion that the central teaching of Jesus Christ is for us all to, "resist not evil." This was developed, as revolution fermented in Czarist Russia, into the technique of, "passive resistance," which Tolstoy described in the last letter he ever wrote, in 1910, to a young Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi, by passive resistance, liberated India. He inspired a young Martin Luther King, Jr. to apply the philosophy of passive resistance to struggle for African Americans to be able to free ride at the front of a bus, eat at a lunch counter or attend a public school.

In his most famous speech, King asserted that the, "magnificent," words of Thomas Jefferson and the other, "architects of our Republic," were a, "promissory note to which every American was to fall heir," and that he and others in the American Civil Rights movement had come to, "cash this check." And a nation's slumbering conscience slowly but surely awoke. And these rights – deemed, "self-evident," and, "unalienable," by Jefferson – were increasingly asserted Black, female, gay, brown, red, disabled, yellow and poor Americans. And, in 2008, a president was elected whose skin color could have, in 1776, made him eligible to have been owned.

### ***The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord***

Written by **Scott Carter**

Directed by **Matt August**

**Opening Night:** Wednesday, October 15, 2014

**Now Extended:** Through Sunday, November 23, 2014

#### **CAST**

**Larry Cedar** as Thomas Jefferson

**David Melville** as Charles Dickens

**Armin Shimerman** as Leo Tolstoy

## **PRODUCTION TEAM**

Scenic Design: **Takeshi Kata**

Costume Design: **Ann Closs-Farley**

Lighting Design: **Luke Moyer**

Sound Design: **Cricket S. Myers**

Projection Design: **Jeffrey Elias Teeter**

Music: **Michael Nyman**

Production Stage Manager: **Maggie Swing**

Dramaturg: **Amy Levinson**

Casting: **Michael Donovan, CSA**

## **PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE**

Monday No performance

Tuesday – Friday 8:00pm

Saturday 3:00pm; 8:00pm

Sunday 2:00pm; 7:00pm

\*There will be no performance on Wednesday, November 19.

## **TICKET INFORMATION**

Ticket prices are currently \$69 - \$74 and are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310.208.5454 or online at [www.geffenplayhouse.com](http://www.geffenplayhouse.com). Fees may apply.

## **LOCATION**

Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater at the Geffen Playhouse  
10886 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Larry Cedar** (Thomas Jefferson) recently debuted his original one-man play, *Orwellian*, based on the works of renowned author George Orwell, at the Hollywood Fringe Festival followed by an extended run at the Odyssey Theatre. Other plays: *American Misfit* (Boston Court), *Lear in King Lear* (produced by The Porters of Hellsgate), *American Fiesta*, *Celadine*, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, and *Around the World in 80 Days* (Colony Theatre). Musicals: *Nightmare Alley* (Geffen Playhouse), *She Loves Me* (Ovation Award - Best Featured Actor in a Musical), *1776* (Reprise!), and as Hoagy Carmichael in *Hoagy, Bix and Wolfgang Beethoven Bunkhaus* (Mark Taper Forum). Larry played opium addict "Leon" for three seasons on the critically acclaimed *Deadwood* (HBO) and starred for six seasons on PBS's *Square One TV*. Other television: *Community*, *House*, *Terminator*, *NCIS*, *Enterprise*, *Alias*, *The Closer*, *Gilmore Girls* and *Boston Legal*. Film work includes *The Crazies*, *Midnight Son*, *Towelhead*, *Hollywoodland*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and a starring role in the upcoming independent feature, *She Sings to the Stars*. Please visit Larry on Facebook or go to [www.larrycedar.com](http://www.larrycedar.com)

**David Melville** (Charles Dickens) is co-founder of Independent Shakespeare Co. and the *Griffith Park Free Shakespeare Festival*. Roles for ISC include Hamlet, Richard II, Iago, Macbeth, Henry V, Benedick, Dr. Pinch, Feste, 8 seasons as Charles Dickens performing *A Christmas Carol*, a one-person *Nicholas Nickleby*, Charles Dickens in *Discord*, WH Ireland in the one man show *Solemn Mockeries* and Beauty Smith in the original musical *Red Barn*. As a composer David has written the music for most of ISC's Shakespeare productions, *Red Barn* and many of the songs for Dr Pinch's vaudeville show. London appearances include the Almeida Theatre productions of *Hamlet* (also Broadway) and *Ivanov* (both of which featured Ralph Fiennes), *Mother Courage* (with Glenda Jackson) and Henry VI in *The Wax King* (The Man in the Moon). TV and film includes: *Lawrence of America*; *Ironclad*; *The Understudy* and *Perfection*. Earlier in his career, David was a private detective and then brand ambassador for Bombay Sapphire – traveling the United States preaching the virtues of gin and discussing golf with liquor executives. David trained at the Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

**Armin Shimerman** (Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy) is well known as Quark, on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. Broadway – *Three Penny Opera*, *St. Joan*, *I Remember Mama*, and *Broadway*. Selected Regional Theater: San Diego Repertory Theater: *Lear's Fool*, Marius in Fugard's *Road to Mecca*, Richard in *Seafarer* (San Diego Critics Circle Award for best actor); American Shakespeare Festival: *Henry V*; Indiana Repertory Theatre: *Hoagy, Bix, Wolfgang Beethoven Bunkhouse*; Guthrie Theatre: *Three Penny Opera*, *Camille*, *Wild Oats*. Selected Los Angeles Theatre: Matrix Theatre: *The Birthday Party* (LA Drama Critics Circle Nom. Lead Performance); Odyssey Theatre: *Misalliance*, *Juno and the Paycock* (with wife, Kitty Swink), *Standup Shakespeare*; Mark Taper: *Richard II*. Associate Artistic Director at Antaeus Theater where he teaches Shakespeare, co-directed *The Crucible*, and performed *The Seagull*, *Macbeth*, many classic fests. TV - 80 different guest star roles, including *Stargate*, Principal Snyder on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Judge Hooper on *Boston Legal*, and recently *CSI*, *Castle*, *Franklin and Bash*. Voice-over - General

Skarr, for three animated shows, many game voices, acclaimed for Dr. Nefarious in *Ratchet and Clank* franchise and Andrew Ryan in *Bioshock*.

**Scott Carter** (Playwright) has served as Executive Producer for *Real Time with Bill Maher* since it debuted on HBO in 2003. He produced the first 1,100 episodes of *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* from its 1993 Comedy Central debut to its 1997 move to ABC. While at "P.I.", Carter received eight Emmy nominations and three consecutive CableAce Awards for Best Talk Series. He has served as creator, producer and/or writer for, among others, *Curb the Discussion with Susie Essman* (TV Guide, 2010), *Root of All Evil with Lewis Black* (Comedy Central, 2008), *Earth to America* (TBS, 2005), *The Conspiracy Zone with Kevin Nealon* (Spike, 2002/2003) and *Exhale with Candice Bergen* (Oxygen, 2000/2001). In 1997, *Variety* named him one of the "50 Creatives to Watch." In 2007, he was a corecipient of the Producer's Guild of America's Johnny Carson Award for *Real Time*. A former standup comedian, Carter has written and performed two full-length monologues, "Heavy Breathing" and "Suspension Bridge," at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, The Aspen Comedy Arts Festival, The Kilkenny (Ireland) Murphy's Cats Laugh Festival, the Cleveland Performance Festival, Dixon Place, Primary Stages, Manhattan Punchline, etc. He is former producing director and a founding member of The Invisible Theatre, now in its 44th season in Tucson, Arizona. Scott is represented by Joe Cohen and George Lane at Creative Artists Agency and by Nancy Rose at the firm of Schreck Rose Dapello & Adams LLP. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, interior designer Bebe Johnson, and their two daughters, Calla and Colette.

**Matt August** (Director) Broadway: *Dr. Suess' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (also all national tours, Madison Square Garden and Pantages); Broadway as Associate Director: *Henry IV*, *Invention of Love*, *Imaginary Friends*, *Full Monty*. Regional: Old Globe - *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Time Flies* (by David Ives) *Pig Farm* (co-world premiere by Greg Kotis), *Food Chain*. Pioneer Theatre - *In the Heights*; *Much Ado About Nothing*; Ford's Theatre - *Liberty Smith*, *A Christmas Carol*; TheatreWorks - *Baby Taj*; The Acting Company (NYC): *Two Gentlemen...*, *Merry Wives...*, Staff Repertory Director; Hanger Theatre: *Complete History of America Abridged*, *All in the Timing*, *Tempest*; NoHo Arts Center - *...Discord*, *Fourth Messenger* (upcoming); Long Wharf: *Sixteen Wounded* (starring Martin Landau); LA Theatre Works - *The Real Dr. Strangelove*, *Speech and Debate*, *Intelligence Slave* (upcoming). He's received fellowships and residencies from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Old Globe Theatre, Drama League, Robert Wilson's Watermill Center, the Juilliard School, San Francisco's Zen Center, received the Panavision New Filmmaker's Grant and mentored upcoming directors through the SDC Observership Program and Drama League Fellowship. His productions have been recognized by the Helen Hayes, Bay Area Critics and Australia's Helpmann Awards and appeared on year end top-ten lists in the *LA Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Oakland Tribune*, *SJ Mercury News* and NPR/KQED. His award winning short family film *How to Get to Candybar* has played at festivals around the world. MFA from California Institute of the Arts.

### **ABOUT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE**

The Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Managing Director Ken Novice, Chief Development Officer Regina Miller and Co-Chairs of the Board Martha Henderson and Pamela Robinson Hollander. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen Playhouse welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains an extensive education and outreach program, designed to engage young people and the community at large in the arts. For more information, please visit [www.geffenplayhouse.com](http://www.geffenplayhouse.com).

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