

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Complete Word of God (abridged)

the Reduced Shakespeare Company  
Criterion Theatre (Thursdays)  
(2003)

The Reduced Shakespeare Company have a winning formula and boy, do they know it! Their main aim is to ensure that they reduce their audience to belly-laughs for about 90 minutes using whatever methods are necessary. They do not worry too much about originality and neither does the audience. As The Right Size have demonstrated with their reincarnation of Morecambe and Wise, brash good humour will sell theatre seats and a bit of nostalgia does no harm at all.

*The Complete Word of God* does for the Bible what the original production did for the works of Shakespeare. In about 90 minutes with an interval between the Old Testament and New, they take weird and wacky angles on the most popular stories in the Bible.

The techniques that the company uses are rather like those of a cross between a pantomime and a revue. There are jokes, running gags, songs, slapstick and audience participation. This last appears to be used to cover up a certain thinness in the New Testament part. Two young ladies from the front row of the audience (not a place to sit if you are shy) are asked (dragged) on stage to do a turn. This is followed by some audience chanting to ensure that they feel involved as well.

The real strength of the production is the energy of the cast, which changes regularly from a selection of about a dozen. They each take on specific characteristics: there is the dumb and goofy one who will always get beaten about the head (on the night under review, Richard Lynson); a handsome leader type (John Schwab); and the brawny one who is never quite with it (Michael O'Conno)r.

They use tremendous verbal dexterity in such scenes as the one about the Garden of Eden and perhaps the highlight of the night, the Tower of Babel. The company makes great use of a stream of consciousness style much loved by improvisation artists. They often seem to be saying the first things that come into their heads about a biblical character. The fact that it is almost always funny, suggests that this is actually very carefully scripted.

The invention is often staggering with such ideas as a slow-motion Chariots of Fire version of David and Goliath, an alternative Ten Commandments and the logical conclusion from the story of Esau and Jacob - that God hates ugly people.

For some unknown reason, the material in the New Testament seemed to be rather lacking. There are however still many good pieces of humour particularly the Last Supper scene and a final quasi-religious medley.

When you've had a hard day and fancy a nice undemanding, escapist evening at the Theatre you are unlikely to go wrong with a Reduced Shakespeare Company production. Depending on your taste and the night of the week, *The Complete Word of God* may be just the thing.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)