

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2023 – The Mystery Plays reimagined

Faith is a member of the Edinburgh Festival of The Sacred Arts committee, who, with friend Peter Holloway, are putting on a drama production which will see a contemporary twist on Twelfth Century *'The Mystery Plays'*.

There will be two performances happening on Sunday 13 August at the St Vincent's Chapel Undercroft in Stockbridge. Performance times are 3.30-4.45pm and 7-8.15pm.

The cellar-like space was surprisingly bright, and the pale concrete shone with powerful overhead bulbs. Occupying the space, were the sounds of quiet rustlings of paper and pens held by about four-to-five young people in tables of 3 or 4 discussing ideas, and inspecting scripts with earnest concentration.

On the venue, Faith said: "I just love this space. It looks like an underground car park. It's very dusty – makes everybody cough! We're going to use torches and things and projections. It's quite minimalist."

Faith, who is a drama practitioner with over 30 years' experience in Drama departments in high schools and Conservatoire Drama training believes that drama offers creative opportunities for students to express themselves, fostering mutual respect and a shared purpose.

As a member of the Edinburgh Festival of The Sacred Arts, Faith was told by the committee of an interest to put on a religious-themed performance this time last year.

Faith said: "I said, okay, I could do something. And they

said: "Would you do something on *The Mysteries*?" (because they are a church based religious space). I said, 'Okay, can we do a modern version? And they said yes."

Taking a short break from the day's workshop, Faith explained the origin of The Mystery Plays.

"The Twelfth Century plays were performed historically in the North of England during the Twelfth Century. Places such as Chester, York and Coventry were primary locations for workmen to translate Bible stories for the masses.

"Because people couldn't read. People couldn't understand latin, and the services were in latin. They didn't know what was going on, they didn't know about the Bible. So – this was a way. It resulted in an annual festival of plays, translating Bible stories by trades' guilds at the time. Boat builders did *Noah*. The nail-makers did *The Resurrection*. There were sort of links between the guilds and the stories."

Asked about the casting process, Faith said: "Some of them knew each other, some didn't. Some of them are a family of two or three and some just signed up – bravely!"

The creator of the five adaptations is Peter Holloway. A BA Durham graduate, Peter's passion for the mystery plays derived from an interest in medieval music and drama.

Peter said: "I've taken these mediaeval plays, and tried to give them a contemporary resonance. So for example, with Noah's Flood, which is a Bible story, we're looking at climate change. And then at the moment, you can see that the groups are working on the Flight to Egypt, so we're looking at the refugee crisis.

"So it's about sort of giving a contemporary spin on these old stories, and making it relevant for young people."

The contemporary recasting of NOAH reflects *climate change*,

SHEPHERDS features a *shepherd family on a hike*. In FLIGHT the refugee crisis will play a focal theme, JERUSALEM presents *The Last Days in Jerusalem*, and RESURRECTION concludes the performance.

He said: "We're really excited. I just met the cast yesterday. They're all so talented and full of ideas. So I'm sure they're going to change it and kind of make it their own production."

With over three decades of experience working in performing arts departments in secondary education, as well as leading community and outreach projects in Lincolnshire and Surrey, Peter has worked with actors and directors to ensure work is contemporary and relevant. He is currently working freelance and developing a website that aims to widen engagement with the arts.

The Mysteries – Reimagined is part of The Edinburgh Festival of The Sacred Arts

- The Undercroft, St Vincent's Chapel, Stockbridge, EH3 6SQ (venue 197).
- Tickets: £10 under 16s £5.
- Booking information can be found [online](#) or on the Edinburgh Fringe [website](#)
- Tickets will also be available on the door. Performance running time: 1hr15 mins.



Door of St Vincent's Undercroft, and entrance to the venue space for The Mysteries – Reimagined performed in Stockbridge.



Director Peter Holloway and the cast during FLIGHT workshop; one of the three performances taking place in August.