



# Comedy play switches genders of Biblical characters

By Bob Evans

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Count on comedic giant Pete Bakely to create something out of the ordinary for each Fringe Festival because he never fails to deliver an off-the-wall entry that draws sold out performances based on his name alone.

So, “Jo” at The Unicorn Theatre benefits from full houses and audience anticipation. For this piece, Bakely did some gender swapping and changed predominantly male Biblical characters to females (presuming God is a male in most people’s minds). But, in this case, God comes in the form of a woman and not just any woman. This woman is Gloria (what else could you name a

female God?) comes to life on stage, portrayed by Briana Marxen-McCollom (a. . k. a. Briana M-M).



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As talented as God is, she can't do it all alone, so her right hand girl, in this case, is Lucifer, or Lu, portrayed by Rebecca Ralston. The lead character, played by Nicole Hall, finds herself as a puppet being manipulated by Gloria and Lu as she faces insurmountable problems akin to those faced by Jonah in *The Bible*. However, with updating and gender switching, Jonah morphs into Jo, and her mission changes to focus on women victims of rape and blame them for the crime committed against them.

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Gloria and Lu create a plethora of unnatural occurrences as Jo attempts to flee from God and cause her to return to her apartment, bargain, and try her own manipulative powers against the great and powerful Gloria. And, true to form, "Jo" features very adult language and sexual content. Bakely's shows are not appropriate for general audiences.

The casting of a super, terrific trio gives more strength to a well-written piece. Briana Marxen-McCollom has performed in Bakely's works regularly in the metro and seems to understand his thought process and the characters he gives her to portray. Rebecca Ralstin shows great timing, facial expression and the nuances needed to deliver a performance that differs from her other local appearances. As for Nicole Hall, "Jo" provides a chance to play a broad comedy role that must change and evolve as the play progresses. All three display fantastic timing, character development, and strong stage presence.



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Brilliantly cast, beautifully directed by De De Deville, "Jo" works and brings laughs throughout. Bakely never fails to bring smiles, chuckles, giggles, and outright laughs from his audiences with his shocking story twists and dialogues. Bakely's works can shock those not familiar with his humor and win them over by the play's end. His collaboration with Deville makes "Jo" one of the funniest entries in the Kansas City Fringe.

Joshua Efron



According to the Fringe website: “Jo comes home one day to find her roommate Gloria is God and her hated coworker Lu is Lucifer. They have a task for her. She really doesn’t want to do it. But God and Lucifer don’t like to take no for an answer. Based on the “Book of Jonah”. Adults only. Directed by De De Deville.”

“Jo” comes with high recommendations but a warning to purchase tickets online to avoid sold out performances. Tickets may be purchased through the [Fringe website](#).

Tags: KC Fringe Festival, Kansas City Theater, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment, “Jo”, Unicorn Theatre