

# Abridged too far

From the bard to the Bible, the Reduced Shakespeare Company can make anything faster and funnier. **Jo Caird** stops the guys for a (speedy) chat

## ▶ I THINK WE APPEAL TO THE BRITISH

stereotype of Americans: we're stupid and have short attention spans. And we're laughing all the way to the bank!' says Reed Martin, writer and performer for the Reduced Shakespeare Company, in typically irreverent style. It's not just Shakespeare that they abridge for comic effect: this month the comedy troupe returns to the road after a few years' break, for a tour of their long-running show *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (Abridged)*. 'The Bible show constantly evolves, if you'll pardon the expression,' says Martin. 'We incorporate recent news events and scandals, notably in "Moses's Top Ten Rejected Commandments", which can often change nightly. We also try to stay up-to-date with the latest theological scholarship. When they discovered and authenticated the lost Gospel of Judas, we got it right into the show.'

The Reduced Shakespeare Company began life back in 1981 with three young guys doing a 'pass-the-hat' routine at Elizabethan fairs in California. Since then the company has had enormous success with six shows, touring around the US, the UK and worldwide, and holding the record for the West End's longest-running comedy for *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)*. Right now, they're writing new material for their forthcoming 2010 show *All the Great Books (Abridged)*.

The secret of the shows' popularity, says Martin, who joined in 1989 and combines performing with writing for the company, is that 'there are so many different types of laughs in the show: smart jokes, stupid jokes, physical comedy and verbal comedy. If one joke doesn't land, it's not going to be long before the next one comes along. It's fun for all the family. Martin is also excited about the new Reduced

Shakespeare Company Podcast, free every week on iTunes, where it consistently makes the top five performing arts podcasts ('It's our audio diary of life in a touring comedy group').

Fellow member Simon Cole says audiences have a 'sense that these three guys are going to throw themselves around the stage for your entertainment'. Along with fellow company members Jack Bennett, John KIELTY and William Meredith, Cole might play any of the show's three roles in any given performance. On stage, the RSC's players are 'very unforgiving,' he smiles. 'We like to trip each other up and call each other if we make any mistakes or screw up any lines.'

**The Bible: the Complete Word of God (Abridged) is at the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, 17 Feb, and the Theatre Royal Glasgow, 21 Feb, [www.reducedshakespeare.com](http://www.reducedshakespeare.com)**



## ■ SEE THE BOYS LIVE

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