

# Bible belting

TAPIT/new works slams religious fundamentalists

By Susan Kepecs

In this best of all possible worlds, TAPIT/new works Ensemble Theater premieres its raucous Panglossian comedy *Source Code: Candide*, in the Overture Center's Wisconsin Studio on April 14-17.

Voltaire's original *Candide* ridiculed the preposterous religious optimism of 18th-century Europe, which went something like this: Since God's perfect, so's the world — wars, poverty and natural disasters are all part of the plan.

Like Voltaire, Danielle Dresden, author of TAPIT's two-act *Candide*, takes on religious fundamentalists. Says Dresden: "Now is such a time of monstrous mendacity in the name of religion, we need someone like Voltaire to come back and tear off the sham piety with cunning satire that unmask the monsters."

Voltaire's *Candide* plunges through myriad 18th-century catastrophes with his guru, Dr. Pangloss, who unflinchingly interprets these events in rose-colored terms while readers realize otherwise.

Dresden's a lifelong devotee. When she was 13, she says, she thought *Candide* should be a movie, with Zero Mostel as Pangloss. The "source code" in her title is a double reference, to the role Voltaire's work

plays in her piece and also to its 21st-century plot.

In *Source Code: Candide*, the title character (played by longtime TAPIT collaborator Nelson Eisman) works for a vertically integrated multinational that produces a stunning range of related products, from bibles to bombs. "The corporation develops a source code that can force any system into compliance," Dresden says. "Fundamentalists are like that, forcing their issues on the national agenda."

The pursuit and loss of the source code propel the adventures in TAPIT's new work. Voltaire's *Candide* gets conscripted in the Bulgarian army; Dresden's goes to Iraq. Voltaire's characters are caught in an earthquake that destroys Lisbon. Dresden's go to Miami, where they tangle with Hurricane Diebold. The original duo run afoul of the Spanish Inquisition and get beaten up; TAPIT's hapless pair get hauled off to Gitmo, where Pangloss reiterates: The worse it gets, the better off we are.

Dresden's Pangloss is a rapture monkey. She's played by Donna Peckett, Mad City's maddest tap-dance queen. "God forbid we should have the right to privacy, or women should have reproductive rights," Peckett says. "Pangloss' black-and-white vision, like Bush's, is naive, dangerous and absolutely wrong."



Dresden channels Voltaire's hatred of 'sham piety.'

Sometimes there's no tapping in TAPIT/new works productions. Peckett says she won't tap if it doesn't serve the play. Happily, in *Candide* she's got two plot-driven numbers — "Count-down to the Rapture" and "When Jesus Is Your GPS Device."

*Source Code: Candide*'s smarts are the sum of various talents, including director Carlyne Haycraft ("a gutsy Australian theater artist," Peckett says) and the

very versatile classical/jazz crossover violinist Diane Monroe, who wrote the score.

It's a play that deserves praise and press, and it'll probably get both. In some parts *Source Code: Candide* might stir up mean-spirited protests for the corporate news networks. But here in the blue heart of Dane County it should rate a hearty "Hallelujah!" ♦

*SOURCE CODE: CANDIDE* RUNS THURSDAY (7:30 P.M.), FRIDAY (8 P.M.), SATURDAY (2 & 8 P.M.) AND SUNDAY (2 P.M.) IN OVERTURE CENTER'S WISCONSIN STUDIO. THE SUNDAY SHOW MARKS TAPIT/NEW WORKS' 20TH ANNIVERSARY WITH A CATERED RECEPTION AND ENTERTAINMENT BY JANE REYNOLDS AND LYNETTE.