

DAILY NEWS

on & off Broadway



MYSTERIOUS MALADY David Adkins (l.) and T. Ryder Smith (r.) in "transFigures," a new play about Jerusalem syndrome

Having a religious experience

An entry from the strange-but-true file inspires "transFigures," a new play by Lear deBessonet, 25, who became fascinated with a mental malady called Jerusalem syndrome.

"It's like a spiritual fever," she says, adding that the documented psychosis is typically triggered by a visit to the Holy City.

Afflicted tourists have reportedly channeled voices of biblical figures — from John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene to Jesus and Moses. Others have been found wandering the streets of Jerusalem wrapped in costumes fashioned from hotel bed sheets. "They feel compelled to make a procession and to deliver a sermon," says deBessonet. No one is certain what causes the

condition, which is temporary (it runs its course in seven days or so) and not restricted to followers of one faith. Sufferers fall into three types: ones with history of mental illness; religious fanatics, and average Joes and Janes.

The play, presented by the Women's Project, revolves around a New York couple and weaves together, "Crash"-like, several story lines and characters.

"I wanted to raise provocative questions," says deBessonet, "about faith and spiritual ecstasy in the world we live in. The syndrome interested me because it's not easy to explain."

In previews; opens April 16 at Julia Miles Theater, 424 W. 55th St. Joe Dziemianowicz

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