



# Church and State A Hilarious Look At Faith, Politics and Gun Control

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## SUZANNA BOWLING

Suzanna, co-owns and publishes the newspaper Times Square Chronicles or T2C. At one point a working actress, she has performed in numerous productions



Rob Nagle Photo by Russ Rowland

Jason Odell Williams's *Church and State*, which opened tonight at New World Stages is witty, smart, and timely, with a political candidate that everyone would have voted for. Here, the moral struggle between faith and life is waged, and ultimately the issue is about gun control. It shows both sides and manages to subtly turn the tables in a surprising turn of events. *Church and State*, will leave you deeply entertained, but will stimulate your brain, so that it will still be hashing over what was said. Make sure you bring a person you love to have deep talks with.

The play begins backstage at a North Carolina political rally, where incumbent U.S. Senatorial candidate Charles Whitmore (Rob Nagle) has escaped from his wife and campaign manager. He is trying to clear his head, but since he is scheduled to appear in just minutes, Alex Klein (Christa Scott-Reed), his Jewish New York liberal campaign manager and his God-believing trophy Southern wife, Sara (Nadia Bowers) (think "Designing Women" meets *Steel Magnolias*) enter. It turns out Senator Whitmore has had a crises of faith due to his feelings about a recent local grade school shooting. When a local blogger interviews him at the funeral, he states "How could I believe in a God who would let this happen?" The blogger tweets his statements and the story starts to go viral. Alex and Sara find common ground and unite to help save the election, but the Senator has other plans and goes rogue.

After his speech, he wins the election by a landslide and Alex and Sara see this going all the way to the Oval Office. Then things change and that's when this show becomes highly interesting.

in film, TV, cabaret and theatre. She has performed at The New Orleans Jazz festival, The United Nations and Carnegie Hall. Currently she has a screenplay in the works, which she developed with her mentor and friend the late Arthur Herzog. She was the Broadway Informer on the all access cable TV Show "The New Yorkers," soon to be "The Tourist Channel." email: [suzanna@t2conline](mailto:suzanna@t2conline)



*Christa Scott-Reed, Nadia Bowers, Rob Nagle Photo by Russ Rowland*



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Stealing the show is Nadia Bowers who brings to mind every character in "Designing Women" and *Steel Magnolias* all rolled into one. This role could have easily gone camp and over the top, but Ms. Bowers' exquisite comic timing is priceless, especially in the drunk scene. Also Williams has written Sara some of the best lines I've ever heard.

Rob Nagle is the candidate you wish existed, but also is realistic as the man whose crisis of morality is haunting him. Originally pro-gun, when a maniac claims the lives of his own children's playmates, as well as the 29 murdered children, the reality hits a little too close to home. We see the ethical dilemma etched all over Nagle's face and then see his strength to stand up and speak from the heart. Playing the sarcastic New Yorker, Scott-Reed manages to make her three-dimensional. Rounding off the cast is Jonathan Louis Dent, who plays several minor roles, but makes his dent as the eager campaign assistant Tom and the blogger who kicks things into high gear.

Director Markus Potter keeps the pace going and walks that fine line between comedy and drama. He brings out the best in his cast and makes this about the play and its words.

Williams is a playwright to watch. He has managed to do what most have not, which is to take this divided country and make us laugh, think, cry and wish for the same things. He shows both sides and makes some strong points. His dialogue wows and his script is highly amusing, but he manages in the end to break through the walls of our heart and make us feel and think.

David Goldstein's set puts us front and center into the campaign. The lighting by Burke Brown is subtle and well done, as are the costumes by Dianne K. Graebner.

This play is definitely on my list for one of the best plays of the year. Bravo for bringing your audience together and making them laugh in this political climate.

Church and State, New World Stages, 340 West 50th St. until July 2nd.



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