

A Village Of Fools

The Grand Falloons come from quite an eclectic background. We are an ensemble of theatre, vaudeville, and design professionals who have all worked in various capacities on the legitimate New York stage, on variety and new vaudeville stages around the world, on national television, and in opera houses, schools, museums and theaters across the country. What we have in common is that we have all worked with the Big Apple Circus for over 20 years.

Our current project is *A Village Of Fools*. Isaac Bashevis Singer's publisher has granted us permission to adapt three stories from his *Zlateh the Goat* collection. The stories move from a celebratory rite of political stupidity in *The Snow in Chelm* through an intimate classic fools journey in *The First Shlemeil* and end with a dark and tragically comic tale reminiscent of Fellini's *Nights of Caberea* in *Zlateh the Goat*. The scenic elements, the landscapes and the puppets, are based on the landscapes and portraiture of Chaim Soutine.

This show combines the work of these two great, Jewish, 20th century Eastern-European masters with the liturgical influence of Elizabeth Swados' music, and the populist instincts of circus and vaudeville. We believe we have created a powerful synergy leading us to a vital musical theater—populist yet spiritual, emotional yet intellectual.

Soutine's characters can be represented on stage most faithfully as puppets. Through puppetry, the same character can appear six inches tall in one scene and in the next be larger than life. One scene can take place on a little puppet stage and the next use the entire theater. One puppet can be meticulously designed with delicate arm, hand, leg, eye, and mouth articulation and the next be a cardboard cutout. We use many varieties of puppets, from cardboard cutouts with flapping arms to life-sized puppets manipulated in a Bunraku style. These constant changes in size, style, music, and dynamic beautifully complement Singer's work, in which the realism of Tolstoy shares the page with the magic of Garcia-Marquez.

Between stories we present shadow plays as a palette-cleansing moment for the audience. The interplay of light and dark will broach the feelings of darkness and passion in Soutine's paintings and lighten them with flickering candles and sudden bursts of lightning. The dramatic and emotional effects are softened by being visually exciting as well as by allowing time for the audience to relax and reflect.

In the end, being vaudevillians and clowns, what we live for is comedy and joy and a **real** family audience. These fairytales of Isaac Singers' offer us enormous possibilities for all three.