



# Same Difference Interfaith Alliance

*at The West Side Center for Community Life, Inc.*

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*Providing unique  
tools for healing  
racial, cultural,  
and religious  
tensions*

## **SAME DIFFERENCE** **An Arts/Media/Education Project for** **Healing Multi-faith Tensions**

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## What's Unique about SAME DIFFERENCE

- We use the arts and journalism as a healing tool in a new and exciting way. Our process is fun!
- We get to the truth – good and bad - right up front. If you don't know what your problems are, you can't fix them.
- Our program focuses not only on one group since 9/11, but on how Christians, Jews, Muslims, and non-faith affiliated citizens are going to find good relationships with each other, here in America.

“What most people of our three faiths don't know is that Isaac and Ishmael reunited. They came together to bury their father, Abraham. So it is possible. We can return to each other and bury the past.”  
- SAME DIFFERENCE

## HISTORY

- In an effort to understand questions and doubts after 9/11, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish artists interviewed over 100 New Yorkers about their passions, fears, anger, and hopes.
- Excerpts from those interviews were combined with music and dance to create **SAME DIFFERENCE: NYC FAITH STORIES IN WORDS, MUSIC & DANCE.**
- *Post-show dialogues* hosted by clergy and academics prompted a huge response as we were inundated with requests from educators, activists, clergy and members of the media to bring our show or process to a wider audience.

## FUTURE

### The Program

Our program and process can be used in many different ways:

- **Replication models** for middle and high school age children, adult community and/or church groups, college religious diversity programs or law enforcement and social service diversity training programs.
- **Website outreach program, a blog** and education materials
- Multicultural training **weekend conference** events
- **A documentary film**

## WHY

The events of September 11, 2001 exacerbated tensions along racial and religious lines throughout America. The events in Iraq have only made matters worse.

- Recent Reuters poll showed that the number of Americans who directly connect all Muslims with violence has risen from 25% to 44%.
- The Hartford Institute for Religion Research FACT study finds that the Muslim presence in the United States has been one of the most rapidly growing segments of our religious mosaic over the last quarter century.
- This same study indicates that 45% of all churches in America are participating in ecumenical programs, while only 8% are doing actual interfaith work.
- Many universities and colleges are begging for diversity education programs now focused on religion and interfaith issues.

*American culture, western culture. These things that I think are so rich and wonderful, I'm aware are profane in the eyes of Muslims and certain Islamists.*  
—SAME DIFFERENCE

## Short Form Documentary – Completed

- 15-minute documentary is sponsored by the United Methodist Women for their national education event on “Interfaith Community”.
- We are inundated with requests for study guide materials to accompany film.

## THE PLAY

### Interview Process

- A diverse interview team from **Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, the American Sufi Muslim Association, The Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, and Muslims Against Terrorism** combed the five boroughs to get a true picture of how New Yorkers relate to each other through their faiths since 9/11.
- Our vast mosaic was well represented as Sunnis, Sufis and Shiis Muslims, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Hassidic Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, Pentecostals, agnostics, atheists, interfaith couples and more were interviewed including New Yorkers with histories from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Austria, Puerto Rico, Argentina and other places.

### Writing Process

- Transcriptions were made from over 100 interviews
- A team of interfaith playwrights and a musician culled 2,500 pages of interviews into a 35-page play with all words coming directly from the interviews themselves.
- Music and dance were inserted at pivotal places in the script to add a greater visceral level of expression and understanding to the journey.

### Creative Process

- Multicultural cast of **14 actor/dancers and 8 musicians**.
- Eclectic group of **composers** included; **Ned Rorem** - internationally renowned classical composer; **Nenad Bach** - Croatian rock 'n' roll star; **Basya Shechter** - Israeli folk artist; and **Mor Dior Bamba** - Senegalese Prince who sang in Arabic over a Latino beat and Klezmer clarinet for a fabulous fusion number that rocked the house.
- Interviews in play include topics ranging from funny food and faith stories to interfaith marriages, to post-9/11 traumas, to media's responsibility, to the current situation in the Middle East, and more.
- Concept of our piece also explored how we communicate. Be it conversation, presentation, argument or debate -- using words, media, music, dance, RAP, you name it – we did it.

"I'm still mad at the Jews because they never told me lox was sushi!"

– SAME DIFFERENCE

### THE IMPACT

- Same Difference has the capacity to change communities at the grass roots level and beyond. Bonds from the first program remain and have sparked other interfaith programs together in New York City.
- Alice Fisher from NCCJ Interfaith board said, "I was amazed at how quickly you were able to get at the core of people's anger and frustrations and communicate them so clearly. It takes us years sometimes to achieve the same results through dialogue groups."
- Educators from middle and high schools, colleges, churches and more begged for a curriculum guide and/or just a copy of the play that they could take back to their classrooms as a tool for study. A guide was written in 2007 for Auburn Seminary's FaithSpace program for NYC high school students.
- Recently we showed our short film to a group of educators and youth from Central Pennsylvania who were hungry for more information and desperately wanted to replicate it in their area. They said, "***We have hardly begun to have conversations about this situation and we desperately need to. We especially want our youth to begin while their minds are still open to possibilities.***"

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Please call Sarah Brockus or Eileen B. Weiss at 212-539-6506

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