

Theater for the New City's Dream Up Festival Presents
"Spinoza's Ethics," by Emily Claire Schmitt
A Journey Through Time With 17th Century Philosopher Baruch Spinoza

WHERE AND WHEN:

September 1 at 6:30 PM, 2 at 6:30 PM, September 3 at 8:00 PM, September 4 at 8:00 PM, September 6 at 6:30 PM, September 7 at 6:30 PM, September 15 at 6:30 PM.

Johnson Theater, Theater for the New City, 155 First Ave. (at East 10th Street)

Presented by Theater for the New City (Crystal Field, Artistic Director) as part of the Dream Up Festival 2016.

Ticket Price: \$15.00

Box office: (212) 254-1109, www.dreamupfestival.org

Runs for 2:00 Hrs. Reviewers are invited

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Based on a true story, "Spinoza's Ethics" follows the life of Ruth, a woman searching for love and God, as she evolves from a starry-eyed sister of faith in a nunnery to a world-faring traveler. Weaving the ideals and character of Dutch enlightenment philosopher Baruch Spinoza into the narrative, this play offers pertinent questions about the nature of life, religion, marriage, and mankind's ever-changing place within them. "Spinoza's Ethics" is written by Emily Claire Schmitt. It is directed by Dianna Garten.

The characters exist in multiple time periods, ranging from the late 1600s to the mid-twentieth century. In the 1600s, philosopher Baruch Spinoza rests on his deathbed, dictating the final words of his magnum opus, "Ethics," to his dear friend Ruth. In the 1900s, Ruth encounters Spinoza in a convent garden, and has her entire worldview challenged. Ruth leaves the monastic life and marries Richard, only to fall into a sexless and failing marriage. As Ruth searches to discover herself, she is faced by tragedy and setback at every turn. Spinoza devotedly accompanies her through every hardship, whimsically helping her to achieve the happiness she's yearned for.

This is a play ponders the mysteries of consciousness and life, as philosophy is an integral part of the story and dialogue. Playwright Emily Claire Schmitt uses her background in philosophy to merge "seemingly divergent realms" of theatrical genres. The play consists of two timelines, each containing two accounts based on true stories. The 1600s timeline is drawn from the life of Baruch Spinoza, primarily his final moments and the completion of his work "Ethics." The 1900s timeline draws inspiration from the life of Schmitt's great aunt, represented by the fictional character Ruth.

There are also themes of mysticism and ambiguity underlining the play. As the stories unfold, the parallel nature of the characters becomes apparent. The duality narratives serves the idea of Spinoza's existence as a shifting panorama; a single existence unbound by the conventions of time.

Emily Claire Schmitt is a playwright and graduate of St. Mary's College, where she developed an interest in both philosophy, theater and journalism. Schmitt endeavors to create works of staged journalism, a past example being her first work "San Luis, 1989," a story of government mishandling of a poaching raid. In "Spinoza's Ethics," Schmitt fuses her interest in philosophy and fantasy into the staged journalistic story of her aunt, embodied by the character named Ruth in the 20th century timeline of the play. The result is a play that combines genres, and will make the audience think not just about the nature of god, life and time, but of biographical plays as well.

Dianna Garten is a theater director based in Harlem. She earned her BFA in Drama from the NYU Tisch School of the Arts and her MA in Applied Theatre from CUNY School of Professional Studies. Garten has recently directed the short works "Who Am I?" and "I Am Cecil."

ABOUT SPINOZA

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch enlightenment philosopher of Sephardi/Portuguese origin. His philosophical ideologies are infamously difficult to categorize due to their vast scale, but experts tend to agree that he was perhaps one of the most influential philosophers to work in the years following Descartes and the pioneer of modern biblical criticism. His final work "Ethics," published posthumously, cemented Spinoza's place in the history of philosophy, as it offered a view of the Judeo-Christian God not as an omnipotent, transcendental being, but rather as the infinite nature that is not only experienced by humans, but also incorporates them. Spinoza is a popular and important figure in Dutch history. His face adorned the 1000-guilder banknote before it was replaced by the Euro in 2002, and the *Spinozaprijs*, the most prestigious scientific award in the Netherlands, was named in his honor. A statue of Spinoza stands in close proximity to the Dutch parliament in The Hague, Netherlands.

The seventh annual Dream Up Festival (www.dreamupfestival.org) is dedicated to new works. Presented by Theater for the New City, the Festival will run from August 28 to September 18, 2016 and will feature a variety of original dramas, comedies, musicals, adaptations and experimental plays. The Festival is traditionally a celebration of the arts in a time when cultural and arts funding is in sharp decline due to a number of social and market forces. Now an East Village tradition, it challenges the audience to reflect on the innovative and imaginative ways that they interact with the theater.

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