

# RED BULL THEATER

JESSE BERGER | FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

JIM BREDESON | MANAGING DIRECTOR

IN COLLABORATION WITH **R/18 COLLECTIVE**

PRESENTS

# THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE

BY MARGARET CAVENDISH

DIRECTED BY KIM WEILD

FEATURING

HEIDI ARMBRUSTER

BECCA AYERS

TALLEY GALE

CLOTEAL HORNE

ANTHONY MICHAEL MARTINEZ

RAMI MARGRON

MARIA-CHRISTINA OLIVERAS

JOSH TYSON

ZOOM COORDINATOR | VICTORIA GELLING

OBS MANAGER | JESSICA FORNEAR

GENERAL MANAGER | SHERRI KOTIMSKY

PRODUCING DIRECTOR | NATHAN WINKELSTEIN

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT PROVIDED BY **ART LAB | MEG FOFONOFF &**

**THE CENTER FOR THE ARTS IN SOCIETY AT CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY**

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MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2022 | LIVESTREAM BROADCAST

THE RECORDING WILL BE AVAILABLE UNTIL 7:00 PM EDT ON FRIDAY, MARCH 18, 2022 –THEN IT DISAPPEARS.

RED BULL THEATER WISHES TO EXPRESS ITS GRATITUDE TO THE PERFORMERS' UNIONS: ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS, AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS, AND SAG-AFTRA THROUGH THEATRE AUTHORITY, INC. FOR THEIR COOPERATION IN PERMITTING THE ARTISTS TO APPEAR IN THIS PROGRAM.

RED BULL THEATER IS SUPPORTED, IN PART, BY PUBLIC FUNDS FROM THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY COUNCIL, AND THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO AND THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE.

ADDITIONAL MAJOR FUNDING HAS BEEN GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY THE ACHELIS AND BODMAN FOUNDATION, , ART LAB | MEG FOFONOFF, THE AXE-HOUGHTON FOUNDATION, THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING, ROBERT BOYETT, DAVID DESJARDINS AND NANCY BLACHMAN, THE JAMES AND JUDITH K. DIMON FOUNDATION, FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK, THE HOWARD AND MARCIA OWENS CHARITABLE TRUST, HOWARD GILMAN FOUNDATION, THE MARTA HEFLIN FOUNDATION, THE KAM FOUNDATION, NOAH MILLMAN AND CAROLYN SCHIFF, EVANGELINE MORPHOS, THE NOËL COWARD FOUNDATION, THE OFF-BROADWAY ANGELS, THE PRINCESS GRACE FOUNDATION-USA, BETTY AND MICHAEL RAUCH, PETER N. RIGBY, THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION, THE MICHAEL TUCH FOUNDATION, AND STEVEN AND JOAN YOUNG.

RED BULL THEATER IS A PROUD MEMBER OF THE ALLIANCE OF RESIDENT THEATERS/NEW YORK, THE OFF-BROADWAY LEAGUE, AND THEATER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP.



Council on  
the Arts



**DONATE TODAY** TO SUPPORT RED BULL THEATER AND INVEST IN THE VITALITY OF CLASSICAL THEATER FOR A CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE. FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS, RED BULL THEATER HAS TRANSFORMED THE CLASSICAL THEATER EXPERIENCE WITH SPECTACULAR, HIGH-OCTANE PRODUCTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES, RAUCOUS READINGS OF RARELY-PRODUCED PLAYS, AND VIVID REIMAGININGS OF ICONIC WORKS.

WE'RE DEDICATED TO REVITALIZING THE CLASSICS FOR TODAY'S AUDIENCES, AND WHILE WE TREASURE THESE CLASSICS, OUR APPROACH IS ANYTHING BUT PRECIOUS. YOUR SUPPORT IS.

WE'RE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING CONNECTION DURING THIS HISTORIC TIME.  
YOUR SUPPORT WILL HELP MAKE THAT POSSIBLE.

[REDBULLTHEATER.COM/makeagift](http://REDBULLTHEATER.COM/makeagift)

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

MADAME MEDIATOR.....HEIDI ARMBRUSTER  
SERVANT TO LADY HAPPY | M. FACIL .....BECCA AYERS  
LADY VIRTUE | M. ADVISOR..... TALLEY GALE  
LADY HAPPY .....CLOTEAL HORNE  
TAKE PLEASURE | AMBASSADOR.....ANTHONY MICHAEL MARTINEZ  
PRINCESS | PRINCE.....RAMI MARGRON  
LADY AMOROUS | M. COURTLY .....MARIA-CHRISTINA OLIVERAS  
DICK | MIMIC.....JOSH TYSON

### ABOUT THE READING

Lady Happy, who has just inherited a large sum of money from her late father, decides to reject marriage (which would force her to surrender her money and power) and instead to open the Convent of Pleasure, a women-only retreat devoted to great food, furnishings, and female friendships.

Once inside, Lady Happy and her new friend the Princess watch the convent members stage a series of micro-plays about how bad marriage is, then themselves stage a surreal pastoral-aquatic masque.

This reading embraces the experimental form of Cavendish's play through Zoom OBS technology and triple casting.



### POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION

This Thursday, March 17, 2022

7:30 PM EDT | LIVESTREAM

Join an interactive online discussion about the play with director KIM WEILD, scholar LIZA BLAKE, and members of the company.

**TUNE IN ON YOUTUBE OR FACEBOOK.**

## ABOUT THE PLAY

Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* is a play that envisions a female utopia. When the play begins we learn that the main character Lady Happy has just inherited a large sum of money from her father's death, and immediately four male suitors, Monsieurs Take-Pleasure, Advisor, Facile, and Courtly, plot marriage for control over this vast fortune. Lady Happy, however, decides that rather than give up her money and power, she will found a Convent of Pleasure, a women-only retreat that, despite calling itself a "Convent", will be devoted not to religious observance but to broadening the realm of female experience: women will act out plays, talk about philosophy, and form female friendships apart from the world of romantic and sexual coupling. The Convent is not just a social or political experiment, however. We learn in Lady Happy's long justification in Act I that it is grounded in a philosophy of nature that aligns the pleasures of a personified Nature with religious belief. In this philosophy, anything that causes our bodies pleasure cannot be unnatural.

Of course, the plot itself will immediately press on and complicate this "naturalness" of bodily and mental pleasures. The suitors, assisted by the go-between Madam Mediator, scheme about how to break into the Convent, and stress how unnatural it is to separate the sexes. The Convent will be visited by a foreign Princess who presents as masculine and who often dresses up in male apparel to "pretend" to court the Lady Happy; the same-sex attraction that Lady Happy feels for the Princess causes her to question the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural. The play seems to end in a very different place from which it started; does this departure show the ideals described in Act I to be unworkable in reality? Or are we meant to see in the dissolution of this secular convent a warning about the specific kinds of pressures that will be brought to destroy such utopian feminist ideals? There is some difficulty in answering even the fairly straightforward question: does *The Convent of Pleasure* have a happy ending?

Formally the play is also very complicated. Though it is divided into acts and scenes, it is very different than many other early modern plays, especially those of Shakespeare, written for the public stage. Cavendish herself notes her very different approach to dramatic form in the numerous prefatory essays to her first collection of plays published in 1662. *Convent of Pleasure*, like all of Cavendish's plays, is a closet drama, meaning it was written with no real intention for it to be staged publicly (though many closet dramas were acted out in households and private spaces). She seemed to find it both frustrating and liberating to not write for the public stage: frustrating in her lack of an audience, liberating in her ability to do things with dramatic form that went

well beyond the norms of typical staged drama. And those dramatic norms are thoroughly violated in *The Convent of Pleasure*, the vast majority of which is made up of things that are not dramatic action: interpolated songs, long philosophical speeches on the nature of pleasure, and numerous plays within plays. The middle of the play gives us an explosion of small micro-scenes (acted out by the members of the Convent) depicting the unhappinesses of childbirth, families, and marriage. The play's disruptive form, alongside this explosion of micro-scenes depicting the miseries of marriage, both work to make the ending of the play (which shows a marriage) all the more unstable—the play's disruptive form invites us to reconsider its content.

## **ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT**

**MARGARET CAVENDISH** (née Lucas), Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673) was an early modern poet, playwright, philosopher, and polymath whose interests were as numerous as the genres in which she wrote. She served as a lady-in-waiting for Queen Henrietta Maria and spent much of her adult life in exile on the Continent during the English Civil Wars. Across the genres in which she wrote, her works take up questions of nature and what is natural—including speculation on whether women are “naturally” subordinate to men, or whether their subordination is a social and historical accident. Her plays often feature women protagonists and center on questions of women's rights and abilities. Though her drama was never performed on the public stages of London during her lifetime, she was deeply engaged with theatricality and theatrical traditions: she attended theatrical performances in both London and Antwerp, as well as being involved (and possibly acting) in the masques of Henrietta Maria's court. She also wrote the first critical essay on Shakespeare's plays, satirized the public stage in her most famous novel *The Blazing World*, and wrote self-reflective essays comparing her dramatic techniques to those of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

—LIZA BLAKE (she/her/hers)

*Associate Professor of English, University of Toronto*

*Associate Professor of English and Drama, University of Toronto Mississauga*



JESSE BERGER | FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
JIM BREDESON | MANAGING DIRECTOR

Red Bull Theater brings rarely seen classic plays to dynamic new life for contemporary audiences. Our work unites a respect for tradition with a modern sensibility.

Red Bull Theater is named for the rowdy Jacobean playhouse that illegally performed plays in England during the years of Puritan rule, and was the first London theater to reopen after the Restoration. This bold spirit is central to our identity. With the Jacobean plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as our cornerstone, Red Bull Theater is New York City's home for dynamic performances of great plays that stand the test of time. The company also produces new works that are in conversation with the classics.

Red Bull Theater delights and engages the intellect and imagination of audiences. A home for artists, scholars and students, we strive to make our work accessible, diverse, and welcoming to all theatergoers. Educational as well as entertaining, our work keeps a rich and vital tradition thriving.

Red Bull Theater believes in the power of great classic stories and plays of heightened language to deepen our understanding of the human condition. We believe in the special ability of live theater to create unique, collective experiences. And we believe in the timeless capacity of classical theater to illuminate the events of our times.

Founded in 2003 with a production of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, Red Bull Theater has been acclaimed by *The New York Times* as "a dynamic producer of classic plays" and by *Time Out New York* as "the most exciting classical theater in New York."

Red Bull Theater serves adventurous theatergoers with OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTIONS, REVELATION READINGS, and the annual SHORT NEW PLAY FESTIVAL. The company also offers outreach programs including SHAKESPEARE IN SCHOOLS, bringing professional actors and teaching artists into public school classrooms, BULL SESSIONS, free post-play discussions with top scholars, and MASTER CLASSES in classical actor training led by veteran theater professionals.

In our 17-year history, Red Bull Theater has produced 21 Off-Broadway Productions and nearly 200 Revelation Readings of rarely seen classics, serving 5,000 artists and providing quality artistic programming to an audience of 65,000. The company's unique programming has received ongoing critical acclaim, and has been recognized with Lortel, Drama Desk, Drama League, Calloway, Off Broadway Alliance, and Obie nominations and Awards.

Visit [REDBULLTHEATER.COM](http://REDBULLTHEATER.COM) for more information.

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