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learningcurves

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Experimental Production Explores Implications of Language

Based on True Story of Youth Raised in Isolation

The experimental theater workshop production of *Casper Hauser (A Language Game)*, produced by Youth Onstage!, the youth theater of the All Stars Project Inc., is based on the true story of Kaspar Hauser, a young man found wandering the streets of Nürnberg, Germany in 1828. He had been raised in a shed without human contact and without language.

Written by Dan Friedman, Nancy Hanks and the Youth Onstage! ensemble and directed by Brian Mullin, *Casper Hauser* runs through Sun. Nov. 14 at the All Stars Project's performing arts and education center, 543 W. 42nd Street (between 11th and 12th Avenues).

Out of an ensemble of seven, four of the young people are from Brooklyn (Brighton Beach, Bed Stuy, East Williamsburg and Marine Park), according to a spokesperson for Youth Onstage!

"Youth Onstage! transforms the German Kaspar into *Casper* who lives in contemporary America, where his experiences — learning to speak and interacting with other people — become a springboard for a theatrical exploration of the philosophical and political implications of language and meaning making," says Dan Friedman, *Casper*'s co-author and Youth Onstage! Artistic Director.

Starting with the true story of Kaspar Hauser, Friedman and Hanks transport the tale to contemporary America



(From left): Nelly Fishenzon (ensemble), Christie Pasqualicchio (ensemble) and Peter Graham (*Casper*) in the Youth Onstage! workshop production of *Casper Hauser (A Language Game)*. Nelly Fishenzon and Peter Graham are residents of Brooklyn. (Photo: Roger Grunwald)

and transform the narrative into a "performed conversation that questions the very premises of conversation itself."

Young performers from Youth Onstage! play with and add to Friedman and Hanks's text. In the course of this language game, the performers play with the ideas of Fred Newman, Lois Holzman, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Lev Vygotsky and deliver a playful performance of the politics of language.

Founded in 1983, All Stars Talent Show Network uses a "performance learning" approach to foster the emotional and social development of young people. Each year, thousands of urban

youth between the ages of 5 and 25 participate in several dozen All Stars events including auditions, rehearsals, talent shows and development workshops. The All Stars involves young people from the poorest neighborhoods of New York City, Newark, NJ, the San Francisco Bay Area, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

Performances: Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. Tickets: \$20 (evening performances) and \$15 (matinees). Children (under 21) pay \$10. Tickets: 212-941-1234 (box office).