

Chestnut Hill Teen to Direct at Philly Fringe Festival

By *Nathan Lerner*

Chestnut Hill resident, Pascale Smith, is only seventeen years old. However, the intrepid adolescent is already taking on the challenge of directing a play, BASH, at the Philly Fringe.

Pascale had already accrued an extensive background in acting. The summer before she was readying for fourth grade, she was cast in a speaking role in M. Night Shyamalan's movie, *The Village*. She recalled, "This was my first experience as an actor, so I went into it with an open mind. I had gone to the audition on a whim, so I wasn't particularly excited or overjoyed at the idea of acting in a movie, but I was certainly curious. After the few months I spent on set, I decided at the ripe old age of nine that this

was what I wanted to do with my life. Since then, I've worked all over Philadelphia and New York in various theaters and independent films." Pascale's résumé reveals that she has appeared at the Prince Music Theater, the Outside the Box Theater, and the Roy Arias Theater Center's Off-Broadway Theater, and the Stagedoor Manor. She garnered awards for Best Lead Actress in Drama for her performance in the role of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Best Major Supporting Actress in a Drama as Titania/Hippolyta in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Both plays were produced at the Stagedoor Manor.

This summer, Pascale spent six weeks further honing her skills at Carnegie Mellon University in their pre-college theater program. She

described the program, "It was an intense experience, and I learned so much. I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to study with some of the best people in the business. This experience only cemented my determination to make performance my career."

With regard to her decision to direct, Pascale explained, "I have always been curious of the other side of acting. I've always been the one on the stage, never behind the scenes. It can certainly be scary at times. I've never directed anything before, nor have I taken any classes on the subject, so everything I've learned is odds and ends that I have picked up over the years watching directors I've worked with. However, this, combined with being an

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actor myself, has served me well." She noted, "Going into rehearsals, I was pleasantly surprised with the ease and fluidity I took to directing. The actors I have been working with are both talented and good-natured, and the process has been incredibly fulfilling." According to Pascale, "Directing is a wonderful challenge, and seeing this play take shape before my eyes has been quite unlike anything I have ever been able to experience as an actor. It has given me a whole new perspective on theater."

Pascale chose a particularly challenging work to make her directorial debut. BASH is a trio of profoundly misanthropic plays by Neil LaBute. It was so offensive to the hierarchy of the Church of Latter Day Saints that they disfellowshipped him.

Pascale first encountered the writing of Neil LaBute a year ago and was immediately enraptured. She recalled, "I first read his play Reasons To Be Pretty. From there, I couldn't stop reading! His writing is dark, clever, and brilliant." Pascale explained, "The reason I decided to direct BASH was because this play really makes you think. LaBute paints an ugly picture of humanity with these four characters, each of which has either committed or ignored an atrocious,

violent act." Pascale qualified, "However, the most disturbing part of this play isn't the vivid description of death, but how ordinary each character is. In such an intimate setting, the audience truly gets to know each character as they recount their crimes. This play displays the evil inherent in everyday life, and as each character justifies their crime, whether they feel remorse or not, the audience is left with a sense of culpability; how often have you sat back and excused something horrible?"

Pascale continued, "While it is true that this play is on the darker side, one of the greatest things about LaBute's writing is that he never omits the joy everyday life is bound to bring. In the midst of all the evil in the world, a young couple can fall in love, a song can be shared between generations, and a person can finally triumph over their nemesis."

Growing up, Pascale originally had a different focus, "I was dead-set on becoming an artist. I spent hours drawing, painting, and sculpting with Fimo clay. My mother would take me to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and I still have my collection of rainbow buttons from those many visits." She conceded, "I'm not too sure what made me desert my first love for the arguably less-practical ca-

reer path to theater, but since elementary school I have abandoned my paint brush and easel for a script and highlighter."

Pascale declared, "For years I have always described myself as an actor, plain and simple. However, more recently I have been expanding my horizons to include music, aerials, and more." She studies songwriting and guitar with Judah Salem Kim of the band, Stonethown. Pascale trained in aerial acrobatics at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts, where she specialized in lyra.

Pascale reflected, "I suppose the best classification for me at this point would be performer. Although I plan to study acting in college, I really can't imagine one craft without the other, and I do hope to pursue all professionally in some regard." She contended, "Without my extensive experience as an actor, I would be a totally different director. My music is definitely informed by my experience with various plays and performances, and my circus performances would probably be very different were it not for my history with acting and music."

In addition to her involvement with BASH, Pascale will be appearing in Ampersand, an aerial circus performance at Philly Fringe. The latter is being produced

by her older sister, Lauren Rile Smith. Pascale declared, "While it is certainly a lot of work, when you're doing what you love, you love what you're doing!"

Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe will continue through Saturday, September 17. For tickets, contact the Festival Box Office at (215) 413-1318 or visit www.livearts-fringe.org.

BASH will be performed on Wednesday, September 14 (8 PM);

Friday, September 15 (8 PM) Saturday, September 16. (8 PM). Moonstone Arts Center. 110 S. 13th Street, Philadelphia. For further information on BASH, visit www.rilePascale.com/BASH.

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