

the village **VOICE**

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LIGA, 50% reward & 50% punishment

Concept by Liesbeth Gritter

Public Theater

425 Lafayette Street, 212-967-7555

What do actors and children have in common? Maybe this isn't a particularly tricky question, but the Dutch theater company Kassys, under the direction of Liesbeth Gritter, has set out to answer it in surprising and entertaining ways. In *LIGA, 50% reward & 50% punishment*, now playing at the Public Theater as part of the Under the Radar festival, Gritter and her charming ensemble breathe new life into the comparison between theatrical performance and social performance—between the actor and the child as two figures who accept

stifling strictures in order to win the approval of director and audience, parent and peer.

Over 70 captivating minutes, *LIGA* traces the way shame and obedience shoehorn childish precocity and play into inoffensive (and uninteresting) adult behavior—for instance, attempting witty small talk at a haute-bourgeois garden party—and, in a parallel motion, shows how well-worn conventions straitjacket the imaginative potential of theater into bland representational realism.

And, thank goodness, the Kassys ensemble turns out to be hilariously (and willfully) bad at garden-fete naturalism. Each cast member has perfected the art of false spontaneity and deliberate awkwardness. Their darting glances and double- or triple-guessed gestures draw us ineluctably back to the idea that "acting natural"—onstage or in the great theater of the world—is not only an oppressive burden, but a contradiction in terms. CHRISTOPHER GROBE