



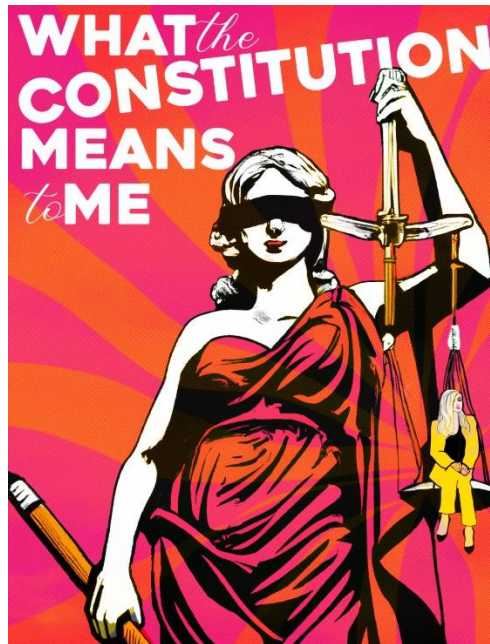
**MEDIA RELEASE**  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: AUGUST 30, 2023

CONTACT: Joanna Penalva  
Director of Marketing + Communications  
315.443.2636 (o) | [jlpenalv@syr.edu](mailto:jlpenalv@syr.edu)

Matthew Nerber  
Marketing Content + Publications Manager  
315.443.9839 (o) | [mjnerber@syr.edu](mailto:mjnerber@syr.edu)

## **SYRACUSE STAGE OPENS 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON WITH HILARIOUS AND HOPEFUL 'WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME'**

*Directed by Syracuse Stage associate artistic director Melissa Crespo*



**Syracuse, New York** — [Syracuse Stage](https://www.syracusestage.com) opens its 50th Anniversary 2023/24 season with “What the Constitution Means to Me,” Heidi Schreck’s deeply personal and powerful exploration of how the United States’ founding document shaped her life, and the lives of the women who raised her. The production runs Sept. 13 to Oct. 1 in the Archbold Theatre at Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St., Syracuse.

First performed off-Broadway in 2018, “What the Constitution Means to Me” was nominated for two Tony Awards and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for drama. The play follows Schreck’s sometimes humorous – often profound – journey as she investigates what protections are promised by the U.S. Constitution, and questions who is protected and who is not.

As a high school student in Washington state, Schreck toured American Legions and gave speeches about the Constitution for college scholarship money. Her oration, which likened the Constitution to a crucible, praised the Founding Fathers for leaving room for interpretation. But soon Schreck, who moved to New York to pursue a career in acting, entered a period of growing disillusionment with the document, and began reflecting on the limits made by the men who authored the Constitution, and by those in power who interpret its words for all Americans. In an interview with NPR, Schreck described the process of writing "What the Constitution Means to Me" as a sort of "reckoning."

"I'm honored to helm one of the most important theatrical pieces of our current times," said director Melissa Crespo. "Heidi Schreck's play breathes new life into the Constitution and will leave audiences smarter and more connected to each other, and our great country."

Reviewing for The New York Times, Ben Brantley called the play "an endlessly open-ended conversation." At Syracuse Stage this conversation is brought to life by Mel House (Heidi), Phillip Taratula (Legionnaire), and current Syracuse University Department of Drama students Emily Castillo-Langley and Malaika Wanjiku, who will alternate the role of The Student. The production team, which includes both Broadway veterans and Syracuse Stage resident artists, is led by Kathy A. Perkins (lights), Ann Beyersdorfer (sets), Carmen M. Martinez (costumes) and Jacqueline R. Herter (sound).

"I felt strongly that this was a great play for Syracuse Stage when I saw the Broadway production four years ago," said Bob Hupp, Syracuse Stage artistic director. "I loved how Heidi Schreck personalized our nation's founding document and used humor to explore such a timely subject matter. With a stellar cast and our insightful creative team, I look forward to seeing 'What the Constitution Means to Me' come to life for our Central New York audience."

All evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. while all matinee performances begin at 2 p.m. Tickets start at \$40 with discounts available for students and groups. Tickets may be purchased online at [SyracuseStage.org](http://SyracuseStage.org), by phone at 315.443.3275, or in person at the Syracuse Stage Box Office.

Pay-What-You-Will performances for "What the Constitution Means to Me" are Sept. 13 - 17 inclusive; Prologue conversations, three pre-show discussions that take place one-hour before curtain time on Sept. 17, 23 and 28; the Post-show Talkback will take place on Sunday, Sept. 17 after the 7:30 performance. Syracuse Stage has its open-captioned performances scheduled for Sept. 20 and Oct. 1 at 2 p.m. and Sept. 30 at 7:30 p.m., as well as an audio-described performance on Sunday, Sept. 30 at 2 p.m.

A special sensory friendly and open captioned performance is scheduled for September 26 at 7:30 p.m. The sensory friendly performance provides a welcoming environment that lets all patrons enjoy themselves freely without judgment or inhibition. This live theatre experience invites autistic individuals, as well as those living with ADHD, dementia and other sensory sensitivities, to enjoy a performance in a "shush free" zone. House lights will be dimmed, but not turned out completely, patrons may move about as necessary for their comfort and patrons will not be discouraged from vocalizing during the performance. Fidget toys and other materials will be provided for patrons. All tickets to the sensory friendly performance are \$35 and include a 100 percent refund right up to the start of the show.

In addition to scheduled performances and programming, "What the Constitution to Me" will feature events in conjunction with the [2023/24 Syracuse University Humanities Center Syracuse](#)

[Symposium](#). “[The Landscape of Tomorrow: Art Exhibit](#),” showcasing artwork created by North Side Learning Center and La Casita Cultural Center’s community members, will be presented on Sept. 13 at 6 p.m in the Coyne Lobby at Syracuse Stage. Visitors to this opening-day exhibit are invited to stay to attend the first Pay-What-You-Will performance of “What the Constitution Means to Me” at 7:30 p.m. “[The Constitution and the Landscape of Our Lives](#),” a panel discussion featuring director Melissa Crespo, professors from Syracuse University College of Law and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and moderated by Suzette M. Meléndez, Faculty Fellow for the Office of Strategic Initiatives in Academic Affairs and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, will be presented on Sept. 18 at 7p.m in the Archbold Theatre at Syracuse Stage. All Syracuse Symposium events are free and open to the public.

The Slutzker Family Foundation is the Presenting Sponsor for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season. Additional season support comes from the Dorothy and Marshall M. Reisman Foundation and Advance Media New York. The community partner for “What the Constitution Means to Me” is the Hiscock Legal Aid Society.

### ***What the Constitution Means to Me***

Written by Heidi Schreck

Directed by Melissa Crespo

Scenic design by Ann Beyersdorfer

Costume design by Carmen M. Martinez

Lighting design by Kathy A. Perkins

Sound design by Jacqueline R. Herter

Emotional Support Coach: Adam Stevens

Production Stage Manager: Stuart Plymesser

Casting: Bass/Valle Casting

### **About Syracuse Stage:**

Founded in 1974 and celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, Syracuse Stage is the non-profit, professional theatre company in residence at Syracuse University. It is nationally recognized for creating stimulating theatrical work that engages Central New York audiences and significantly contributes to the artistic life of Syracuse University, where it is a vital partner in achieving the educational mission of the University’s Department of Drama. Stage’s mission is to tell stories that engage, entertain, and inspire people to see life beyond their own experience. Each season, 70,000 patrons enjoy an adventurous mix of new plays, and bold interpretations of classics and musicals, featuring the finest theatre artists. In addition, Stage maintains a vital educational outreach program that annually serves more than 15,000 students from 14 counties. Nationally, Syracuse Stage is a member of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for American theatre; The League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the largest professional theatre association in the country; the Professional Non-Profit Theatre Coalition (PNTC), independent venues, promoters, and festivals representing every state, Washington, D.C., and Guam. Regionally, Syracuse Stage is a member of the Arts and Cultural Leadership Alliance (ACLA), Center State CEO, the University Hill Corporation, and the East Genesee Regent Association.

###

Syracuse Stage | Artistic Director: Robert M. Hupp | Managing Director: Jill A. Anderson  
820 E. Genesee St. | Main: [315-443-4008](tel:315-443-4008) | Box Office: [315-443-3275](tel:315-443-3275) | [www.SyracuseStage.org](http://www.SyracuseStage.org)