The Rise Of Spinoza
Opera In 4 Scenes
Libretto and music by
Theo Loevendie

Duration: 50 Minutes.

Personae:
Baruch (Bento) Spinoza, Countertenor
Clara Van Den Enden, Coloratura Soprano
Frans Van Den Enden, Father of Clara, Tenor
Rabbi Saul Morteira, Bass-Baritone
Jacob Van Eyck, Recorder Player.

The people of Amsterdam
in a mainly jewish neighborhood, Mixed Choir,
Market vendors, 9 Singers
Ma’amad, leaders of the jewish community, 8 singers

Orchestra
SCENE 1

Spring 1656. Marketplace In Amsterdam.
Darkness and morning twilight
Merchandise is provided by small boats on the river Amstel
A Crowd of Costumers is gathering little by little

Market Vendors:
    Fresh oranges from Jaffa!
    Haddock! Fresh salmon!
    Fresh herring, just from the Zuidersea!
    Mackerel and sparling!
    Fresh butter, cheese and eggs!
    Mackerel and sparling!
    Turnip greens and spinach!
    Oyster plants!
    Great roses, daisies and beautiful lilies!

Blind Jacob van Eyck and a drummer
enter playing and, after having collected money from
the people in the market place, leave again.

Rabbi Morteira enters

Baruch Spinoza is brillant
He is the best student I ever had
But he is a danger for our people.
Even outside our community
His reputation as an atheist is growing.
A dangerous situation.
No doubt no doubt
About his integrity
I don't expect him to have changed his mind lately,
But let us see if he did....

Spinoza enters.

Mort: I cant believe that you
    Insist on your opinions and
    throw the belief of our ancestors
    away like rubbish.
Spin: I dont throw anything away, Rabbi.
    I only do some research

Mort: Research? Research?

You are under the influence
of this godless person
called Van den Enden!
You call that research?

Spin: I have learned a lot from you, a lot!
The discussions with Van den Enden
Are very inspiring.
As I cannot agree with everything
You've taught me
I am considering the right way to go.
You cannot be against my search for the truth.

Mort: The right way?
It's the wrong way.

Spin: You always advised me to study every opinion
to find the truth.
You, Rabbi Morthera, said so
In that, I am following your path!

Mort: You know the holy law, the Torah, and you know
that anybody violating it will burn in hell!
You have been a brilliant student.
A gem for our community;
But you are taking the wrong path now.
You know that since 1492 the situation
of our people in Spain and Portugal
became worse and worse
after prosecution in Spain and Portugal.
But they found a save haven
here in the Netherlands.
Now you endanger our community
with your so called modern ideas.

Spin: I study Latin with van den Enden and his daughter
to be able to read Descartes or Cartesius if you like

Mort: That's not good!

**The discussion draws the attention of the people;**

Peopl: Cartesius, Descartes,
Who are they?
Are they merchants from another market?

Spin: Silence, please, please.
The Rabbi is speaking!

Mort: Descartes or Cartesius,
Exactly what you’d better not read.

**All are gathering around Spinoza & Morteira.**

Spin: You can’t be against it
I am only studying his ideas
You always said to me:
Learn! Learn! Learn!

**All, except Spinoza and Morteira:**

Learn, learn, learn!
That is his sole concern.
But we try to make a living
From money that we earn.

Leren, leren, leren,
Dat kan het tij niet keren
Want zonder iets te eten
Kan men leren wel vergeten

Mort: (To The Crowd):
Let me finish my story!
Please!!

After the muslims were expelled
From Spain and Portugal
Muslims, with whom we had
a great deal of prosperity,
We were dispersed in many countries
Fleeing from the Inquisition
Many found refuge in the Ottoman empire
But in Europe they could find
a safe haven only in the low countries,
the Netherlands.

Peopl: A safe haven, the low countries, The Netherlands!

Spin: Rabbi, this is a well-known story

Peopl: A well-known story!!

**Morteira makes again a gesture to silence the people**

Mort: Baruch, my proposal is this:
We, the ma’amad of our community
Give you the opportunity to dedicate your life
To freely write books
On one condition:
You abstain from texts that are harmful
To the interests and well being of our people

Spin: Who will judge that?

Peopl: Who, who, who, who will judge?

Mort: The Ma'amad, Of Course.

Peopl: You, you, you are judging. Rabbi Morteira!!

Spin: Impossible!!!!!
   With all the respect I have for you:
   I can't give up my freedom to
   Write what I think.
   Never!

Peopl: Impossible!
   Never, never, never give up your freedom
   To write what you think!

Mort: This is a shame for our people!
   The Kherem is unavoidable!!!
   You know that these 30 days the Ma'amad
gave you are almost finished
   I am proud that you were my student
   In your interest I advise you
to seize this last opportunity!

Morteira leaves.
The crowd start a song:

Tal es la gloria, Bento,
De los que escriben cantares
Oír decir a los gente
Que no los ha escrito nadie.

Learn, learn, learn,
That is our sole concern
But we try to make a living
From money that we earn

Market Vendors:

Haddock!
Oranges from Jaffa

Peopl: We try to make a living
From money that we earn.

Market Vendors:

Fresh oranges from Jaffa
Cheese and eggs
Fresh butter
Great roses, great daisies
And beautiful lillies
Fresh Herring
Scene 2

FRANS VAN DEN ENDENS’ ACADEMY
AT A CANAL (THE SINGEL) IN AMSTERDAM
VAN DEN ENDEN’S DAUGHTER CLARA TEACHES
LATIN TO SPINOZA

Clara: Now next page please, Bento.
Spin: Emicat extemplo
      laetus post talia matris dicte suae
      Phaethon et concipit aethera mente
      Aethio pasque suos positosque sub ignibus Indos
      sidereis transit patriosque adit impiger ortus.
Clara: This is enough, tomorrow we go on.
      You learn very quickly, Bento.
Spin: You inspire me to do my very best Clara.
Clara: You inspire me too, of course I adore you.
Spin: In what sense? It confuses me when I think of you.

Van den Enden rushes in.

Frans: Listen, Bento, the Kherem is soon,
      let’s talk about it.
      But first: an important question,
      (ironically) if my daughter allows me.
Clara: I heard this before. Go ahead father.
Frans: I have a proposal for you, Bento:
      do you want to lecture Hebrew
      in this academy of mine?
Clara: This is an excellent, idea father.
Spin: Hebrew? Well Hebrew,
      Hebrew, teach Hebrew against Latin?
Frans: Yes, Hebrew.
Spin: I'd like to accept it and be even closer to Clara,
      but I am in doubt.
      I want to write, write books, many books.
      Hebrew, Latin.
      Two different traditions in one house!
      I decide to accept this offer.
      I shall be with Clara, we'll do our best,
      both Clara and I for your academy.

Clara: He'll be a jewel for your school,
      we get along very well together.
      We'll get along, very well.
      This is good for the school and good for us,
Frans: You like each other very much, but don't make plans for the future, Clara. She is a... (lucky fellow) ...she is a devout Roman Catholic. I struggled a lot to rid myself of that religion. She is different; she does not want to leave the church! You want to be romish?

Spin: I'll never never be a follower of any creed or any church, let alone the church of Rome. Many of my ancestors were suppressed or killed by the Inquisition. Being with you, Clara, I'd almost forget that.

Clara: I am not responsible, and I don't approve that!

But it is true, I belong to the church of Rome, the holy Church of Rome, and nobody can change that, nobody, no one, not even my father or Benedictus Spinoza,

Choir: (OFF STAGE) Patrem omnipotentem
Choir: factorum coeli et terrae, visibilium omni um et invisibilium.

Clara: Patrem omnipotentem ……

Clara disappears.

Frans: Bento, listen:

Today I'll meet with a group of dear friends of mine, dissidents, like you and me, to talk about the situation in Holland. You know some of them, like Jan Wiewertzoon, who runs the bookshop in the Dirk van Hasselt Alley. All of them are brave protestants, but the slightest difference in opinion is even an incentive to form splinter groups.

Spin: My contacts with some of them have been very useful. They criticize certain aspects of their background, like I am doing with mine. We all must be critical towards what they tell us.

Frans: You are beginning to see the light.

Spin: Morteira taught me so.
Frans: Morteira, Morteira!! Morteira!
   I don’t question his abilities,
   it’s his attitude.
   Take the Da Costa case:
   on the initiative of Morteira the People walked on his naked body,
   after which that poor man committed suicide.

Sin: I don’t agree of course with such terrible things.
   It shows how far People go
   when they think they have God on their side; their God.
   But what is God?
   Dear friend, what is God?
   I think I know.

Frans: They omit terrible crimes in the name of God!
   You know it. You know what I mean by that word.
   What I mean by that word is nature.

Spin: Nature? That’s something,
Frans: Ev’rything, what means nothing
Spin: Ev’rything, what means something,
(both laughing)

Blind Jacob van Eyck enters, accompanied by Clara.

Clara: Everybody knows him, Jacob van Eyck.
   He’ll now play for you his variations on the well known song:
   Prince Robbert was a gentleman, his father was a king.

Frans: I know it!

Van Eyck plays one variation

Spin: "Another one please."

Van Eyck plays the second variation

Frans: "Now the last one, please.
   I have a meeting with the protestant dissidents."

Van Eyck plays the third variation

Van den Enden hastily leads Van Eyck away.

Applause by Clara, Spinoza and others.

Clara: One question, dear Bento;
   do you believe in the miracles depicted in the Holy Bible?
Spin: No, my dear,
   it is a good example of how things are blown up
   and made up in the course of history.
   Like the sun standing still,
which is scientifically proven impossible.

Clara: Very soon now the Kherem will take place; do you fear the verdict?

Spin: No! No, I don’t fear the verdict. I think they will punish me with exclusion from the community, for some days or some weeks, for having my kind of opinions.

Clara: I love you Bento but we are not meant for each other.

Spin: I want to write books to improve human conduct; our understanding of the world, the Universe and its laws.

Clara: He is the man with whom I could share my life. there is life after death we’ll meet, under much better conditions.

Spin: I want to write books to improve human conduct our understanding of the world, the Universe and its laws. She is the only woman I could share my life with. But my task is different. But I’ll always remember Clara.
Scene 3

THE KHEREM

Curtain rises
Amsterdam Synagogue. The Ma'amad, lead by Rabbi Morteira, studying documents.

Mort: No doubt, a danger for the community.
Any comments on the verdict?
M’d1: Baruch must be given another chance to change,
to change his mind;
that should be his last chance.
M’d2: He had one month to obey,
to change his mind and he didn't.
We must use the Kherem sparingly,
With this kind of punishment,
Maimonides once wrote,
Otherwise it looses effect.
M’d1: He wrote so. We do so.
M’d1: Maimonides did not know Spinoza
and his evil ideas,
M’d2: He knew mankind, he knew us all
Mort: We agree; Baruch is guilty!
But we could give him one last chance.
Let him come in.

Mort: Baruch Spinoza,
you’ve had one month to change your mind.
And?
Spin: Yes, Rabbi.
It would be a lie if I'd say I changed my mind.
M’d: He did not change his mind
Spin: To put it more clearly:
I’ll never stop writing what I think.
M’d: Baruch is lost, lost for our community,
Spin: In coming years I’ll write down my opinions.
After having studied Cartesius
M’d: Baruch is lost, he's lost.
Spin: I'll start writing about democracy
and the problem of religion and state.
M’d2: Cartesius?
M’d1: He means Descartes
M’d2: My god, Descartes
I'm grateful for all I've learned from you, but...

I will not follow your path.

Studying human conduct and the meaning of the word God.
What does that word imply?
What is God?
Is He a person?
If God isn't a person,
how can He speak to Mozes?
Such as is written in the Bible?
If He is an Almighty God,
How can we ever influence Him?

Dear gentlemen of the Ma'amad,
I respect you highly.
But a duty stronger than that forces me to leave you now.

Shalom aleichem.

Peopl: Bento Spinoza, is he really a danger?
M’d1: Baruch, is he a danger and ripe for the Vatican?
M’d2: He is a Protestant by nature.
M’d1: He’s not Jewish anymore

Mort: Sinhores, please,
we now proceed to the announcement in public.

M’d: Light the candles!
Cover the windows!

Peopl: Bento is a bright young man.
He is a gem of our community.

M’d: Close the door!

Mort: The Senhores of the Ma'amad,
gathered on the twenty-sixth of Temmoz,
in the year five thousand four hundred fifteen,
equivalent to Thursday, the twenty-seventh of July, sixteen fifty-six,
in the city of Amsterdam,
and having known the evil opinions and acts of d'Espinoza.

Many Rattles

Mort: Knowing all that,
the Senhores have endeavoured
by various means to turn him from his evil ways.

Morteira steps back, the other Ma'amad members step forward.

M’d: But, having received more and more information
about the abominable heresies,
which he practiced.
This man Espinoza should be... (interrupted)

Two rattles
Peopl: Excommunication?
   Excommunication!
Mort:  We excommunicate,
       expell, curse and damn Baruch d'Espinoza

Silence in the audience.

Mort:  with the consent of God, blessed be He,
M’d:    Blessed be He,
Mort:  and with the consent of the entire holy congregation,
       and in front of these holy scrolls
       with the 613 precepts which are written
       here in cursing him with excommunication
       and all the castrations written in the Torah.
       Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night!
Peopl: Bento expelled from his People.
M’d:    We warn that nobody may contact him,
        nor do him any favor, nor read any paper he wrote.
Peopl: Bento expelled from his People.
        Bento expelled from us!
Scene 4

DEPARTURE.

Van Eyck plays the recorder near a canal at the outskirts of Amsterdam. A trackboat is waiting for departure.

Frans: Bento has not arrived yet.
       The trackboat to Rijnsburg leaves in half an hour.
       It is good for him to leave Amsterdam.
       Life became confusing in this city.
       One attack on him with a knife is enough.

Spinoza appears

Spin: Good morning François.
Frans: Bento, the voyage to Rijnsburg will take about seven hours.
Spin: Which means I can read and write the whole day.
Frans: I have something to tell you.
       I have met a professor of philosophy of the Protestant university in Heidelberg.
       They plan to recommend you for a post of assistant professor of philosophy.
Spin: That's great!
       I feel flattered, but...
Frans: Listen!
       "On condition that you refrain from anti christian opinions."
Spin: But why are they so afraid of my opinions?
Frans: I told them about your opinions.
Spin: Please, tell this gentleman that...
       that I am not ready to accept this honorific offer.
       They might ask me in ten years from now.

People enter gradually.

Peopl: Bento will always be one of us.
       We do respect him.
       We support Bento.
       We shall support you!
       We're proud of Bento.
       Very proud!

       Tal es la gloria de los que escriben libros.
       Oír decir que no los ha escrito nadie.
       No los ha escrito nadie, no, nadie.

Clara emerges from the crowd.
Spin: Dear Clara, wonderful to see you now!
Clara: Dear Bento, take care of yourself,
    be sure I still love you,
    but we both...
    we are not meant for each other.
Frans: It was a great pleasure to encourage Bento.
Spin: I'm sure we'll have a happy life
    with my friend and ally Kerkringh.
Clara: You know it
Spin: I know it
Frans: You know it
Clara: He will be a good Catholic soon.
    Bento we'll meet in another world,

**Clara disappears.**

Frans: We'll meet again soon,
    Deo volente!
Spin: Volente Natura!

**They laugh, hug, and leave separately.**

**The End**