

Picasso at the Lapin Agile

by Joel MEGGS

Rarely do I see a play and wish I had the chance to read the script. But, then again, rarely does a play come along that is as fast paced and rich with content as *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. This one act play kept me on my toes for the whole hour and a half, and left me with a sense that I could see the play four more times and still not completely get it. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* is an extremely thoughtful, very ambitious play that accomplishes all that it sets out to do. The play is written by Steve Martin, which is probably its biggest claim to fame. It isn't hard to envision this play coming from the mind of Steve Martin; its style is just like Martin's own brand of fast-paced, multi-faceted humour.

Picasso chronicles an unlikely meeting between Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein at the dawn of the twentieth century in a tiny salon called the Lapin Agile, in France. Einstein is waiting for a lady friend when in comes a different woman, named Suzanne. She says she is in love with Picasso. It isn't long before Picaso shows up. For the rest of the play, all the action takes place within the Lapin Agile between Einstein, Picasso, Suzanne, the barkeep and his wife, and Gaston, a local with an overactive bladder. A lot of opinions are expressed about topics as varied as the extent of Eintein and Picasso's genius, whether or not they are simply using their genius to attract women. They debate art versus science, the value of a painting on the wall, what the twentieth century will hold, and more. The opinions given by the characters, including the non-geniuses, are thoughtful and insightful; at times, the play is almost like a circle discussion out of Plato's Republic.

The action is punctuated by the arrival of a couple more "geniuses": Charles Dabernow Schmeniman, whose discoveries are not on par with Picasso's or Einstein's, but who considers himself a celebrity anyway, and "a visitor," whose real identity it is not necessary to reveal in this review, lest

you be planning to take in the play when it comes to Summerside. Suffice to say that he adds even more to the debates the characters have – debates that shape the twentieth century.

The play establishes itself as surreal early on when Einstein enters the Lapin. The barkeep informs Einstein he has arrived early as, according to the program he grabs from an audience member, Einstein is fourth in appearance. That sort of half-serious tone is maintained throughout the play. For every laugh the dialogue elicits from the audience, there is another line that will either baffle the audience member completely or leave him deep in thought. Its most amazing feat is its ability to be an absurdist play that deals with some fairly weighty matters, while maintaining a whimsical tone that is a joy to watch.

Theatre New Brunswick has a the feather in its cap with the flawless production of this very demanding play. Steven Martin would be hard pressed to find a better rendering of his 1996 work. The acting is fantastic. Einstein is played to perfection by Matt Baram as a eccentric, slightly effeminate chatterbox. Picasso, played by Jonathon Monro, is equally entertaining as a womanizing egocentric. Chalottetown's own Ed Rashed puts in a rather good show as well as Freddy the barkeep. But by far the funniest performance belongs to Richard Cronin, who plays Schmendiman, an over-the-top eccentric who mistakenly thinks his place in History is as secure as Einstein and Picasso's.

The staging itself is a credit to TNB. The script calls for some elaborate stage work, not the least of which involves the café falling away to find the characters surrounded by millions of stars. TNB manages to pull it all off without ever taking the audience out of the moment.

Between the fantastic performances and the excellent staging and sets, the play is completely believable, even though it is filled with incredible concepts. The dialogue is

rich and delivered to perfection with impeccable timing by the cast. You will leave the play wishing for more, or even just the chance to see it again.

The Theatre New Brunswick production of Picasso at the Lapin Agile will be performed on October 24th at the Jubilee Theatre in Summerside.

GAME 17

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Picasso at the Lapin Agile was the first published original play written by which of the following comedians?

- A. Bill Murray
- B. Nathan Lane
- C. Martin Short
- D. Steve Martin



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