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Picasso at the Lapin Agile

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Joel Roster (Picasso), Alexandra Creighton (Suzanne), and Mick Mize (Einstein) Photo Stu Selland

The action is classically constructed with the rule of unity of place, action and time (with a caveat), but that's about all the classical there is about it. It takes place in the little Parisian Caf  called Le Lapin Agile (which is, in fact, the oldest cabaret in Paris and is still in operation at 22 rue des Saules). Working from documents of the time, the set was constructed representing the inside of the popular Montmartre place. The bartender, the barmaid and a regular customer (named Gaston, of course) are on stage all along, as interesting patrons come in and out.

Think of the first act as the appetizer, or even the *mise-en-bouche*, of the play. The real fireworks begin after the short intermission, when Picasso makes his entrance. Porter cast Joel Roster as Picasso. It's a dream role for anyone with a bit of spunk, and Roster takes it away brilliantly. Mick Mize, who plays Einstein, gets even better in his interactions with Roster. The duo- sometimes duelists - is quite believable.

There is more to the play than Picasso and Einstein. "It is interesting in the play to listen to the voice of the women," said Porter, "the heroes are the men, but the women are the ones that tell the truth about human nature." The character of the Barmaid, Germaine, played by Beth Deitchman, is particularly endearing and clairvoyant. One can't help thinking of Gustave Flaubert, who after writing *Madame Bovary* allegedly said, "Madame Bovary... it's me!" Did Martin put a lot of himself in Germaine? Or was he thinking of himself as a genius? Possibly a bit of both.

The evening ended with a feeling of lightness and amusement. As the play picks up speed and Martin's humorous take on things shines through, a third act would be good but he leaves the audience wanting more.

For more information or to buy tickets, go to www.THTC.org.

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Paris at the turn of the 20th century is on the mind of many creators and curators this season, from Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, to the Picasso exhibit at the De Young Museum (until October 10), or the just-closed Steins Collection at the SFMOMA. Steve Martin's play, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, which is set in 1904 Paris, runs from September 24 to October 15 at Lafayette's Town Hall Theater (THT).

"It was quite a coincidence," said THT Artistic Director Clive Worsley, "when we planned for our 2011 season the Woody Allen movie was not yet heard of. All these cross references are interesting, but the play is not really about that particular era or place."

Picasso at the Lapin Agile tells the story of a fictitious encounter between Picasso and Einstein one Paris night (along with a few other surprising characters.) "The play asks a lot of questions," says Lisa Anne Porter who directs the production, "about what happens in geniuses' brains when creation take place, what kind of people are the geniuses, what happens when the market place takes over their creation, what becomes of the dreams of people at the beginning of a new century. Steve Martin throws a lot of things in the air, not always giving answers, and of course it is spiced up with his typical sense of humor."