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History and hilarity collide in 'Picasso at the Lapin Agile'

By Debby Nicklas

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Megan C.C. Walker plays wise waitress Germaine and Cameron Rose plays scientist Albert Einstein in "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," running through Oct. 26 at the San Luis Obispo Little Theatre.

RYLO MEDIA DESIGN

Picasso, Einstein and Elvis walk into a bar. That's not a joke — just the premise of the hilarious "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," now playing at the [San Luis Obispo Little Theatre](#).

This clever and witty play, written by actor, screenwriter and comedian Steve Martin, provides a glimpse of what a meeting would be like between freethinking artist Pablo Picasso and rational scientist Albert Einstein before they became famous.

The time is 1904. The place is a bohemian bar in Paris called the Lapin Agile ("Nimble Rabbit" in French).

Over drinks, Einstein (Cameron Rose) and Picasso (Toby Tropper) philosophically debate genius versus

talent and art versus science with unexpected humor.

Both are on the verge of greatness which they cannot yet grasp and only dream about. Einstein will publish his special theory of relativity in 1905 and Picasso will paint the famous “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” in 1907.

Complementing the two historical figures is a cast of supporting characters who each provide special meaning and purpose to the play. Freddy (Bobby Kendrick) is the simple-minded owner and bartender of the Lapin Agile, who expresses words of wisdom when you least expect it. His girlfriend, Germaine (Megan C.C. Walker), is a wise waitress and also a former lover of Picasso, which causes some dramatic tension.

The amusing bar patrons include Gaston (Tom Ammon), an incredulous and incontinent barfly musing about the effects of old age; Suzanne (Alicia Klein), an avid admirer of Picasso and another former lover; and Sagot (Larry Kaml), Picasso’s energetic art dealer. Additional comic relief is provided by Charles Dabernow Schmendiman (Jamie Foster), a zealous inventor representing the possible perils of commercialism.

A mysterious time-traveling Visitor (Arash Shahabi) who closely resembles Elvis Presley turns up later in the play. He comes as a messenger from the future to help Picasso and Einstein channel their dreams of greatness. (This is an interesting twist but seems somewhat distracting from the premise of the play.)

To the surprise and delight of the audience, the actors make sure to remind us that ‘Piacasso at the Lapin Agile’ is only a play after all. In one instance, Freddy stops the performance when he realizes the characters on stage are out of order. He reaches out to an audience member to get a copy of the playbill to confirm that Einstein entered the bar too early.

Suzy Newman’s direction is fast-paced, playful and well-constructed, while all the actors are top-notch with impeccable comic timing. The entire performance takes place in a set designed by David Linfield that looks exactly like a Parisian bar.

Randon Pool’s costumes truly complement each character. For example, Einstein is dressed in a suit twice his size, which helps give the impression of a young man with big ideas.

Martin, the famous “wild and crazy guy,” has created a “wild and crazy play” filled with originality, humor and intelligence. Be prepared to laugh out loud as you ponder the meaning of genius when history and fiction collide.

If you go

"Picasso at the Lapin Agile"

7 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, through Oct. 26

San Luis Obispo Little Theatre, 888 Morro St., San Luis Obispo

\$15 to \$26

805-786-2440 or www.slolittletheatre.org

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