

new leaf



P.O. Box 30030 Chicago, Illinois, 60630 773-391-9800 newleaftheatre@hotmail.com

Picasso at the Lapin Agile by Steve Martin
Directed by Brandon Bruce

REVIEWS

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Picasso at the Lapin Agile by Steve Martin

The space looks more like a Jacobean antechamber than a *fin de siècle* cabaret, but Brandon Bruce's revival fully captures the anarchic spirit of Steve Martin's wild and crazy historical fantasy. It may be contrived and cute, but this quirky 80-minute romp is also inebriated with ideas and manifestos. The 20th century looms like a blank check, and the Lapin Agile bistroteems with artists and intellectuals. Martin brings together the soon-to-be-famous - Einstein, discovering the underpinnings of theoretical physics, and Picasso, womanizing up a storm as he prepares to abandon the color blue - with a crackpot inventor, knowing codger, sensible barkeep, artist's mistress, savvy art dealer, and clinging countess.

The play's one false note is a silly coda in which a time-traveling celebrity shows Picasso a vision of "Les demoiselles d'Avignon", as if genius needed a jumpstart. Fortunately Bruce refuses to dignify Martin's revisionism, treating the scene with humor. Christopher Prentice's manic Picasso is possessed by images soon to be executed, Scott Markwell's Einstein is the ultimate nerd who changed the world, and Merrie Greenfield deftly delivers a rich speech in which she accuses artists of seeing all women as interchangeable inspirations. Since every character, an embryonic stand-up comic, a dose of reality would be fatal, spoiling the playfulness. New Leaf's staging - its inaugural show - is just what the jester ordered.

- *Lawrence Bommer*

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