

Provincetown Theater Company

Project Proposal

Name:

PALMER GARY Date: 1/15/98
Last First

Address:

City/State/Zip

BAYBERRY LANE, TRURO, MA 02666

Phone:

Day 508-349-6498 Evening SAME

Name of Production:

Title PICASSO AT THE AGILE Playwright STEVE MARTIN
LAPIN

SEE ATTACHED

1. Please summarize the proposed production. For example, will the play be realistic or stylized, contemporary or period? What is the play's theme? How do you visualize this production? How many are in the cast? Males? Females? Can you double?
2. Describe the production planning done for this project. Where do you propose to perform the play or project? Do you have set/light/costume designs planned or in mind? Do you have designers available for any of the above? Which, if any, will you need? Do you have a stage manager? Are there any potential problems that you can foresee at this time?
3. Explain how this project will reach and benefit the citizens of the community. (Include promotion, expected results, and plans for evaluation.)
4. List qualifications of key artists and personnel. (If a play, list director, stage manager, lighting and technical supervisors. Attach resumes, references and reviews of previous work.)
5. Please give a concise, rough draft of information you would like included in a press release.
6. Budget: Please itemize your estimated expenses and the names and phone numbers of all persons responsible for each item on the back of this form. Will there be any special expenses for effects (sound/lighting/scenic)? Are there any special promotional activities?

As you know, we are Provincetown's community theater company. With this in mind, will the production be cast from open calls? If there is to be any precasting, please explain why it is needed.

Please submit a copy of the script with this proposal form.

PROPOSAL FOR PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE by Steve Martin

1. I am writing this for Gary Palmer who is still running for election in Truro. (The election is in May.) He would like to direct this piece as the second production of the summer season at the Provincetown Inn.

Play is set in a bar in Paris, 1904. One year later, Albert Einstein published the Special Theory of Relativity. Three years later, Pablo Picasso painted "Les Demoiselles D'Avignon."

There would be an open casting call.

2. Director - Gary Palmer

AD & Stage Manager - Sue Bowlin

Gary has designers available for sets, lights and costumes.

Gary will have more specifics available by the end of the month.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Bowlin

1/15/98

"Lapin Agile" misses on matters of time, space and place

By Susan Grilli

THEATER REVIEW

In "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," actor-playwright Steve Martin places a small collection of the most influential minds in history in one of the hottest gathering places in turn of the century Paris, and gives them an evening to converse, match wits, genius and wonder. Humanity and its failings and triumphs are all wrapped up in a neat package and delivered to us through the characters of Pablo Picasso, Albert Einstein and their evening's associates and companions.

"On this night the earth stood still and listened to a conversation," says the playwright through the voice of his characters. It's a great concept — and one would like to imagine such a moment could occur if it were to be held in the palm of an inspired individual.

Unfortunately, inspiration seems to be what is lacking in this production. The players have neglected to give their characters the much-needed breath of life which sustains their presence on stage. The mo-

ment, the conversation, the dialogue, is lost under the weight of the empty spaces between line deliveries. An actor delivers a line. Another actor responds. But what about between the lines? What about the inner life of each character that makes the work interesting? This essence and level of work is obviously missing and because this is not an inexperienced cast one might guess the lack of depth is due to a lack of rehearsal. At best, we witness instances when we see the cast struggling for timing, struggling for ensemble, but at those times they are placed in such odd and distant positions on stage they are actually physically thwarted in their task.

One overlooked choice is the play's location. I imagine Martin chose the Lapin Agile for a reason. Certainly Picasso and Einstein could have easily met anywhere in the world. It is the director's responsibility to discern, why that location? and work toward what it rep-



Photo Vincent Guadagno

Pablo Picasso (Steve Bakunas) paints a picture for Albert Einstein (Frank Mitchell) in the Provincetown Theatre Company production of "Picasso at the Lapin Agile."

resents. Had Margaret Van Sant done that, the players might have found a thread of commonality to cling to instead of resembling a pack of American tourists dumped by the European wayside, left to search for clues to the way out.

Standout performances in the production belong to Nick Harris who capably fulfills his caricature of the wheeling dealer Sagot; Frank Mitchell, who gives the most clearly defined interpretation of humor and humanity in his portrayal of Albert Einstein; and John Hayes, who

appears out of the future as the visitor with affirmations for Picasso. Unfortunately for Hayes, most of his energy on stage is spent trying to extricate himself from theatrical quicksand.

The technical aspects of the production hold nice choices. The costumes designed by Edward Baker, with inspiration from Nancy Waage, are well done, attractive and authentic. The set, created by Tony Jackman, is a treat in its suggestion. Sitting and waiting for the houselights to go down and listening to the French ballad, one is pulled by the set into the possibili-

ties and infinities of the art of theater through the years — of great minds and souls and art at work. Ironically, all of that energy is sucked out of the cosmos once the players appear.

Steve Martin's work may be brilliant, and the nuances in the writing that were caught by this reviewer are something I think a higher caliber of performance — one that incorporates the nature of the French, their rhythm, drive, lusts, insights and hopefully their speech — might ignite an equally brilliant evening of theater.



A funny 'Picasso' from P'town Theatre Co.

PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE PROVINCETOWN THEATRE COMPANY AT THE IMPROV ASYLUM

(Through December 21)

BY DAVID VALDES GREENWOOD
in *newsweekly* theater critic

"Picasso at the Lapin Agile" is a play of ideas, a valentine to the 20th century written by comedian Steve Martin. Very little happens in the play, which is essentially a long colorful set of character sketches connected by witticisms and bathroom jokes. At its best, it is inventive and charming; at its worst, it is flat and self-indulgent. It is definitely a script with some charms, but one that is dependent on its staging for real life.

The burden on the cast of the Provincetown Theatre Company is doubled by the fact that they seldom get to play to a full house. Performing in the cabaret space of Improv Asylum in the North End, they are restricted mostly to afternoon slots with evening performances only on Sunday and Monday. These are not theatre-going times, which means meager houses,

which means lower energy, which means the actors struggle to perform comedy in a vacuum. They struggled mightily when I saw it, with equal parts success and failure, for an audience that would have fit in a mini-van.

The Lapin Agile is a French bar at the turn of the century where Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso (ahistorically) meet and bond as Great Men. The two leads are written as geniuses with human foibles that get tested on the people who pass through the bar: a bartender, saloon girl, gentlemen, countess, art dealer, and inventor. Unfortunately, these other roles are written as props, some with clever lines, but with very little to do. The effect is sometimes merry and sometimes plodding: so many people, so little going on.

As Picasso, Steve Bakunas strides onstage and commands it; he has a sexy presence and thus makes a convincing cad (an artist whose pick-up trick is to scratch a dove into a woman's skin). As his art dealer, Nick Harris holds the stage in similarly strong fashion. Frank Mitchell's Einstein comes and goes, in part because the humorous lines he must deliver need an audience to play off. Several other roles barely

registered, less because of the acting than the writing, including a man who needs to pee every few minutes and an overconfident inventor with a half dozen lines. That the actors agreed to these roles and played them with gusto is to their credit.

Occasionally, even with a tiny

As Picasso, Steve Bakunas strides onstage and commands it; he has a sexy presence and thus makes a convincing cad (an artist whose pick-up trick is to scratch a dove into a woman's skin). As his art dealer, Nick Harris holds the stage in similarly strong fashion.

house, the play really zinged along. When the bartender (a too-contemporary Alex Juchniewicz) launches into an elaborate math riddle to stump Einstein, the rising tangle of word problem meets ridiculous scenario is laugh-out-loud funny. (Who knew SAT humor was possible?) Martin's uniquely absurd jokes ("Two words I can't stand: twice and perky") either grab you or don't, but the freshness of the lines is almost enough to obscure the fact that the play is pretty poor for women, who are simpering sex objects or jealous scolds (though Kris Dean does an admirable job delivering an unlikable speech about Picasso's sexism).

As the evening-length one-act winds toward its end, a surprise visitor from the future joins them as the third great genius of the century, and the play—now firmly entrenched in a pattern of balancing strengths and weaknesses—gets more magical and less sophisticated all at once. Picasso and the visitor both needlessly speechify, and the moral focuses on how the century will be remembered; Martin settles on the somewhat naive notion that for the first time in history, no political or government movement will be remembered as much

achievements in arts and science. (Note to Steve Martin: Nazis.) Happily, though, he also uses this scene to celebrate the act of creation — of ideas and of art. The ceiling flies off the bar and the confluence of the century's great achievements seems quite grand.

Director Margaret Van Sant capitalizes on the rightness of the cabaret setting for a play with interactive moments, though she allows actors to deliver excellent lines with their backs to the audience. Edward Baker's costumes bring color and style to the proceedings, balancing out the set, which has a high-school play literalness that only makes the cramped nature of the space more evident. It's as if every plus must have an attendant minus, so that hard-working cast and crew never reap a full reward. Perhaps with better time slots and larger houses, the energy would rise enough to cover up the flaws in both script and production. For now, the pleasures and pains are exactly equal, a formula better suited to math than to art.

Picasso at the Lapin Agile by the Provincetown Theatre Company at the Improv Asylum through December 21. For tickets call (617) 263-6887.