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& THE PARROTHEADS**
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On Stage

Adoration of Dora

Madness and the muse

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By Amy Kepferle · Wednesday, March 4, 2015



Although Pablo Picasso is never seen onstage in Lojo Simon's *Adoration of Dora*, the legacy of the world-famous painter looms large in the play—and not always in a good way.

While it's long been known that Picasso was a serial philanderer, Simon brings his amorous pursuits to light in a way that drives home the sometimes devastating consequences of his actions. Specifically, how they affected his longtime lover and muse Dora Marr, an artist in her own right both before and after meeting Pablo and falling under his creative spell (and into his passionate embrace).

After viewing the production last Sunday at the iDiOM Theater, I feel confident in saying Simon made a smart decision when she decided to keep Picasso offstage in the production. You see, the all-female cast does an

exemplary job of telling Marr's story without the distraction of a flesh-and-blood legend.

When I talked to first-time director Shu-Ling Hergenbahn-Zhao a few minutes before the show started, she told me that when she was going through season submissions with her husband Glenn (iDiOM's founder and artistic director), she let him know she was interested in either playing the title role or directing the production. When the play made the cut thanks to its innovative structure and form, its sense of humor and its subject matter, the opportunity arose for her to direct—and she took it.

Part of what's been so fulfilling about helming *Adoration of Dora*, she said, was working with a “truly amazing” cast and crew of women.

Soon enough, I saw what she meant. In addition to possessing the acting chops necessary to pull off Marr's story—which focuses on a period in the French photographer and poet's life that ranges from when she first met Picasso to years later, when his continued philandering drove her to near madness—the actresses involved in the production also had to possess a fair amount of courage.

Props must first be given to Cass Murphy (Dora) and Becky Byrd (Marr) who show the duality of Marr's mercurial personality by playing separate factions of the same woman. In addition to baring their souls to the audience, there's a pivotal point in the play—Marr's first posing session with Picasso—when they must expose more than simply what's on the inside. When the time comes to do so, they are brave and unflinching.

The actresses playing Dora's equally creative friends Nusch (Laura Engels), Jacqueline (Anna Mostovetsky), and Valentine (Tera Contezac) hold their own onstage, and provide much of the comic relief to be found in *Adoration of Dora*. They are bawdy and sexy and intelligent, and made me want to hang out with them (even when they were personifying a trio of evil dictators).

Finally, Bridget Sievers charms as Marie-Therese Walter, one of Marr's rivals for Picasso's affections. There's a scene in the play when the two mistresses take on the roles of bull and matador, and I wasn't quite sure who to root for.

While there are many more elements to the tale of a woman who almost loses herself and her talents due to the copious desires of a legend, suffice it to say that *Adoration of Dora* will make you think. At times, it may also make you uncomfortable. And that's a good thing.