

Backstage:Review – A Picasso

June 9, 2018 | Sophie Ricketts



***A Picasso*. Produced by NO Productions. June 8 – 9. Christchurch Art Gallery. Directed by Michael Adams. Reviewed by Sophie Ricketts, Backstage Christchurch.**

The Christchurch Art Gallery is the perfect venue for a play all about one of the most famous artists of all time, and the Philip Carter Family Auditorium was a brilliant and intimate setting. From the moment the doors were closed we were given an immersive welcome to the space, and it became clear we were going back in time to World War II. The live announcements by our German usher were a nice touch and really set the scene for us all even before the play began.

In occupied Paris, 1941, Pablo Picasso has been summoned from his favourite cafe and taken to a storage vault for an interrogation by Miss Fischer, a cultural attache from Berlin. The play is a one-scene wonder, and the entire course of action takes place inside the interrogation room. Fischer has been ordered to authenticate three Picasso paintings recently confiscated by the Nazis from their Jewish owners. The Nazi Ministry of Propaganda has planned an exhibition where they will burn what they deem to be degenerate art. Picasso engages Fischer in a desperate negotiation to save his work while the pair discuss art, politics, sex, and truth.

Natalia Oryshchuk as Miss Fischer is clearly in the driver's seat here and she handles the terrain with complete composure. Giving her character a hint of softness to balance out her steely reserve makes for a lovely, three-dimensional performance and it is a delight to watch.

As the master artist, David Allen presents a layered performance which is tremendously forthright and surprisingly vulnerable. It is a great contrast from other roles I have seen him in previously when he has played much meeker men. Seeing him wrestle with his ego is wonderful and his diction is splendid throughout the rapid wordplay of his monologues.

The two of them are valiant in their delivery of this marvellous script; playing a verbal tennis match, handling Jeffrey Hatcher's exceptional words with care and certainty. Michael Adams' direction is delicate and direct, nicely playing with the dynamic of tension on stage, both sexual and political.

As NO Theatre Productions continue to push creative boundaries in Christchurch I delight in seeing what stories they will bring to us next. Their use of multiple venues across the city is engaging and *A Picasso* is a perfect example of utilising the performance location to its maximum effect. All in all, it was a great night out at the art gallery, watching the art quite literally come to life.