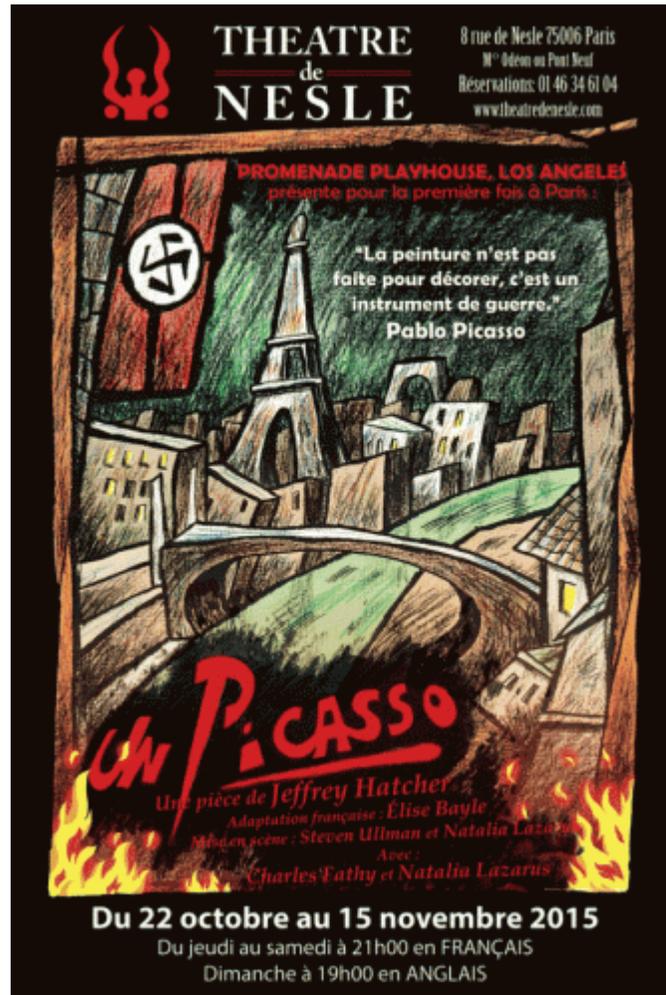


“A Picasso” at The Theatre de Nesle

“We have never been more free than under the German Occupation.” (Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations III, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, page 11-14)



Recently performed in Los Angeles the play *A Picasso* by Jeffrey Hatcher has just arrived in Paris at the De Nesle theatre whose programming continues to improve. This fiction received the support from the Picasso Administration and perfectly illustrates the thought of the Master when he said: “Painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war...”



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This reminds us of his famous painting, *Guernica*, and the play obviously refers to it. The theme of the play is actually quite pared-down, but opens essential aesthetic and philosophical questions. In one place and almost in real time, a man (Picasso) and a woman (Mademoiselle Fischer, a Nazi) confront each other in a ruthless duel reminiscent of another famous writer's thought, Woody Allen: "Art changes nothing in life, sadly!"



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During the German occupation in October 1941 in Paris, a young Nazi woman, Mademoiselle Fischer, very attractive, convokes Picasso to authenticate three of his works of art. Picasso is resigned willy-nilly but requires reason. Mademoiselle Fischer tells him about her mission: organize a "degenerate art" exhibition for the Occupation Leaders in order to make a bonfire. Picasso desperate wants to save his works of art and affirms that all three drawings are in fact fakes.



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A verbal jousting ensues. A nervous, lively and witty debate led by two actors possessed by a text of great sensitivity, based on a real knowledge of art history and Picasso's life.

Perfectly directed, impeccably acted to such a degree that Charles Fathy sometimes embodies disturbing airs of Picasso even if he has a different body build. The audience is also fascinated by the presence and beauty of Natalia Lazarus who embodies a more than credible Nazi woman in a double perverse game of seduction and sadism, which often go together. Art, politics, and the role of art in society, herein is the theme of this play, one which is never outdated, always exciting, even if the clean Manichaeism to American culture does not escape you, an excellent translation, dramaturgy, and spatial arrangement that leads to reflection not only on the place of art in the world, but especially on its effectiveness. Indeed, as noted by the Nazi woman, the canvas of Picasso's *Guernica* did not stop the war and its atrocities. We are reminded, at this point, of course, of the phrase often misinterpreted by Jean-Paul Sartre: "We have never been more free than under the German occupation", that should not be read as an almost collaborationist provocation, but as the brand of total existentialist commitment, which can be summarized that by not choosing, we are still choosing. In this play, Picasso's works of art are narrowed down to the magical number of three. They are analyzed and placed in the historical and artistic context of the painter in 1941, but when you get to glimpse them on stage they appear as black canvases, as if the directors want to give free rein to the imagination of the audience. Picasso is well portrayed: with the Iberian and virile strength of a centaur, it is only deplorable that he didn't fully develop his political commitment. But what can a committed communist, facing the duplicity and violence of a Nazi do, but try to resist using equally fallacious quibbles, such as being denied of his art to better save him? A very intelligent and intelligible play to put before all eyes: a field trip idea for a philosophy class.



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A Picasso, a play by Jeffrey Hatcher produced and staged by Steven Ullman and Natalia Lazarus. With Charles Fathy (Pablo Picasso) and Natalia Lazarus (Mademoiselle Fischer). From October 22nd till November 15th 2015: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 9pm in French and Sundays at 7pm in English.

Added English Performance: Friday October 30th, at 9pm.

Theatre of Nesle. 8, rue de Nesle 75006 Paris Metro: Odéon. Tel : 01 46 34 61 04

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