



Review: Actors Bridge Ensemble's *The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep*

Actors Bridge Ensemble continues its highly valued tradition of presenting thought-provoking local premieres

SEP 14, 2016 3 PM



Jennifer Richmond as "Ada"

PHOTO BY GRIFFIN DUNN

With *The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep*, Actors Bridge Ensemble continues its highly valued tradition of presenting thought-provoking local premieres. Better yet, their essentially low-tech production successfully connects its audience to author Diana Grisanti's

emotionally tense and intellectually stimulating perambulation through the stressed-out mind of a modern young woman.

Ada used to attend divinity school. Now she works as a call center agent for a property management company. Her journey from academic promise to soul-sucking 9-to-5 serfdom is rendered in a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards in which the hyperconscientious Ada first accuses a male professor of sexually harassing a friend, and later attempts to help a young woman leave an abusive relationship. As it turns out, both of these actions end up sabotaging Ada's career and livelihood. (Some people simply don't want to hear, or deal with, the truth.)

Meanwhile, Ada (portrayed by Jennifer Richmond) is wracked by insomnia and reveals a devotion to the Catholic saint Gemma Galgani (1878-1903), an Italian maiden who endured stigmata and various religious "ecstasies" before her early death and eventual canonization. (There's [a website dedicated to Gemma](#) that is definitely worth checking out.)

Clearly, our heroine has issues. Almost magically, a psychologist appears, a Dr. Newbauer (Tamiko Robinson Steele), who engages Ada in talking therapy in an attempt to help her understand her inability to sleep and her savior complex, which is exhibited here by her penchant for helping other women to free themselves from bad situations with men.

Billed as a 90-minute one-acter, the show plays closer to two hours, but tight direction by Leah Lowe keeps the action — and Grisanti's nervous, pulsating central character study — moving forward with a momentum that's driven home by some excellent ensemble performances.

Richmond and Steele are familiar Music City talents who certainly do not disappoint — Richmond effectively balancing Ada's manic highs and lows, while Steele imbues her shrink with warmth, understanding and a dollop of tough love.

Good support is provided by Sejal Mehta, Austin Olive and Madeline Marconi, the latter deftly handling the two related roles of the "damsels in distress."

ABE newcomer Jay Lovell is excellent: first as the womanizing college teacher, and later as a physically threatening lunkhead with anger problems. His characterizations ring true enough — in their way representing a less-than-flattering profile of at least some modern males: selfish, predatory, limited, unfeeling, chauvinistic, even exhibiting a potential for brutality. (Lovell's sexual harassment scene is sufficiently off-putting but undeniably rendered with subtle power.)

A few screen projections assist our understanding of circumstances and incidental facts, and some visuals that inform the play's climax — reminiscent in spirit of John Pielmeier's *Agnes of God* — help to elevate the drama in an impressive effort already filled with reverberant moments.

ABE's season kickoff piece is a serious theatergoer's challenge and again finds the company thriving with newer contemporary material.



The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep

Presented by Actors Bridge Ensemble

Through Sept. 18 at Darkhorse Chapel