



THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014

## Review: Truth Values: One Girl's Romp Through M.I.T.'s Male Math Maze

I had the opportunity last night to see Gioia De Cari perform her auto-biographical one-woman show *Truth Values: One Girl's Romp Through M.I.T.'s Male Math Maze*. De Cari transforms herself into over 30 characters to tell her own story of being a female mathematics PhD student at M.I.T. Her story is filled with moments of true hilarity, but crosses often and deftly into serious topics of gender inequality, gender bias, and expectations - society's and her own.



The characters De Cari plays primarily reflect conversations that she had with fellow students and professors, a number of whom made their views on stereotypes and the inferiority of women more than clear. As a married woman, she faced assumptions that her ultimate goals were to have children and, therefore, why was she wasting her time trying to obtain a math PhD? We see her struggle with being able to focus on math - and we find that despite the logic tied to math - being able to focus is not a Boolean value. De Cari talks about not only struggling to find a physical place to fit in, but also of emotional ones where she could accomplish what she wanted to accomplish. De Cari ultimately brings us a rich story, layered by many voices, that ultimately allow her journey and her voice to shine.

A project of Unexpected Theatre, De Cari performs *Truth Values* nationally. I recommend keeping an eye out for the next time it is in town as it is a must-see for both its entertainment value and the message it resonates regarding the challenges women in the STEM fields face. De Cari relayed in the performance's Q/A that the story, perhaps, may never have been told except for a statement made in 2005 by Lawrence Summers, then president of Harvard. Summers suggested in an interview that "innate gender differences" can explain why there are less women represented in the sciences than men. Surprising statements like these - yes, there are more than one - are presented throughout De Cari's play, offering stark reminders regarding the struggles women face even when they arrive to the upper echelons of STEM subject matters. While audience members were able to share stories that reflected a somewhat improved situation, there was definitely a lingering sentiment that De Cari's story is one of many and that many problems still persist that make it challenging for girls and women to succeed in STEM fields.

*Truth Values* was a part of USC Visions & Voices, an Arts and Humanities Initiative that features performances, lectures, exhibitions and more. I highly recommend checking out the events offered through this program as it includes an impressive amount of eclectic events open to the public.

**Full Disclosure For This Review:** While my English Major roots probably wouldn't surprise most people who read my contributions to the ExperienceLA blog, I actually have a strong background in technology as well. I minored in Web Technologies and Applications while at USC where I can vouch for the numeric disparity of gender in almost all of those classes. It was rare when I was the only woman in a class, but being one out of two or three women in a class doesn't make for great numbers either. While I thankfully didn't face the same adversity De Cari faced, knowingly loving a subject and being unable to feel that you're actually seeing a room full of your peers

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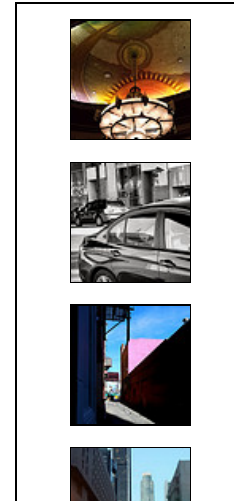
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makes for a challenging environment to thrive in, making you unsure of who to reach out to when you stumble. Outside of the classroom and college environment, there were certainly times when I was the only woman in a technology panel or at a meeting to discuss technical projects and I often wondered if I'd be respected on the same levels as everyone else (re: all the other males in the room). Stories like Gioia De Cari's are important to see and hear because these are the stories that break down the barriers - the silence that can gather when you feel like you're alone - revealing the richness of connectivity and familiarity that we might otherwise take for granted.

-Charity Tran, *ExperienceLA.com Editor*

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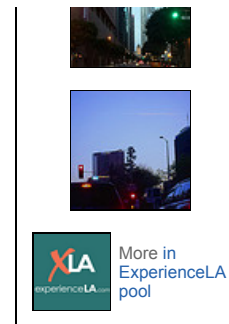
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