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"Truth Values" at the Central Square

Last week I [interviewed Gioia De Cari](#) for the Globe about her one-woman show, "Truth Values: One Girl's Romp Through MIT's Male Math Maze," and this week I went to see it at the [Central Square Theater](#). It was every bit as funny and serious and entertaining as I hoped, but ... different. On the phone - and in that picture over there - De Cari comes off sharp and funny, Tina Fey with a little less self-doubt. I expected her to pretty much strafe MIT from the air with witty zingers. And there's some of that. But the De Cari who appears on stage in "Truth Values" - sans the smart-chick specs - seems far more vulnerable than the one I spent time with on the phone.



There are a lot of laughs in the show, which was attended by several groups of women, young and old, on the night I went. As it charts De Cari's course through the often very sexist hallways of MIT in the 1980s, sometimes the laughs are as much at the expense of the geek genus as they are at men. Either way, a lot of those laughing seemed familiar with what she described. Before the lights went down, there was a woman in the row in front of me passing the time with a few complex equations in a little notebook that she appeared to carry everywhere. About to make a Nobel-prize breakthrough, or just avoiding small talk with her seatmates? You be the judge.

DeCari arrived at MIT as an honors graduate of Berkeley in math, one of the best and brightest, who was perhaps naively surprised at the levels of commitment and insanity shown by her fellow post-grads. It's difficult enough to take the on-ramp onto that mental speedway, without being asked why you're there when you could be home having babies. Folks bleating about political correctness running rampant on our college campuses apparently haven't tasted the cookies that De Cari, as the only woman, was asked to serve at a weekly seminar.

But for all of the fun that I and other journalists have had highlighting De Cari's angle on campus sexism - Larry Summers' unfortunate remarks about women in science drove her to finish the play! News hook! - this is a much more personal show than advertised. Her on-stage persona, at least, seems softer, less bold than that chick up there lolling on the desk. She is reluctant to directly confront the misogyny she encounters at MIT, displacing her anger into a series of increasingly hilarious and inappropriate "fashion experiments" that seem to upset her few female colleagues as much as they distract the men. Her rage wrestles with self-doubt, and it's only when she recaptures a youthful love of performing away from the blackboard that she begins to take the reins of her own career. A painful development that I won't spoil here completes the change.

Like the best monologists (monologists?), DeCari balances the deeper story arc with a steady stream of funny bits. The fine folks at MIT (all pseudonymous) seem to have provided her with an endless supply of demented material, and it's the detail that makes it work. The show may be just a little too committed to charting each step of her journey; she could let a few of the sidelights go in the last third of the 80-minute show, keep full focus on her personal revelations and finish 5 or 10 minutes sooner. But that's a nitpick.

The only real criticism I have is, unfortunately, going to seem sexist. That blue top is a fashion experiment that's got to go. The ruching seems distractingly senior-prommy and doesn't fit either the nervous math girl who arrived at MIT or the smart, edgy performer she has become.

"Truth Values" continues through Sept. 20. [Click here](#) for details and tickets. #

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