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De Cari: Hot personality in a cool environment.

Gioia de Cari's 'Truth Values' at Annenberg

BY: Ilene Raymond Rush 10.05.2013

Women continue to battle stereotypes to break into science and math. Gioia de Cari claims male chauvinism drove her out of MIT. But her one-woman show suggests that perhaps she really preferred a career on the stage.

Truth Values: One Girl's Romp Through MIT's Male Math Maze. Written and performed by Gioia De Cari; Miriam Eusebio directed. Through October 5, 2013 at Harold Prince Theatre, Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. unexpectedtheatre.org.

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Pity the woman with brains

ILENE RAYMOND RUSH

The topic of Gioia De Cari's energetically honest, and sporadically funny play, *Truth Values*, couldn't be more current. Women continue to battle stereotypes to break into science, technology, engineering and math, only to bump against gender-challenged comments like those delivered to De Cari by one of her MIT professors: "Wouldn't you rather be home with babies?"

De Cari's 90-minute one-woman performance brings several such maddening moments to the fore. In one, she compliments a fellow math major who returns a zinger: "You're the sort of woman I'd like to darn my socks." An MBA approaches her in a lounge where she is studying and condescendingly identifies her as a Wellesley undergrad. When she explains she is married and a math PhD candidate, he immediately retreats and asks if she tutors.

Dealing with dorks

De Cari is an animated performer with a valid gripe, but her voice tends towards the grating and whiny. She spends too much time describing her anger, rather than dramatizing its cause. And some of her accumulated slights seem thin.

For example, when she complains to the dean of women about a fellow student who had developed an unwanted crush on her, the dean replies, "Only one?" I couldn't help wondering why a woman of De Cari's alleged brains and skills couldn't find a way to deal with some of these dorks on her own.

Why'd she quit?

De Cari's response to MIT's sexist status quo is to wear over-the-top *über*-feminine ensembles, purportedly to unnerve the male chauvinists in her midst. Such a strategy, while amusing, hardly seems like an adequate or mature protest against institutional bullying.

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In the end, after finding a sympathetic professor and breaking ground with a few women in the program, De Cari finishes a masters of science but abandons the PhD. No doubt she had a hard road at MIT. But one wonders if her real problem was institutional sexism or the difficulty of being a hot personality in a cool environment. De Cari's dream of becoming an actor – she appeared in several productions while a graduate student— may have simply trumped her math research.

Her reading of a few intensely poetic lines from her master's thesis leaves little doubt that De Cari was indeed capable of earning a PhD, regardless of the sexists in her midst. So the question that that lingers as you leave is: If she wanted a career in math, why did she leave the program?



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