

## Spine: 'In Session' by La Petite Noiseuse Productions

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Oliver

Mónica López-González's new play, *In Session*, now playing at Johns Hopkins' Swirnow Theatre, ripples with ideas — rich ideas, fascinating ideas on such subjects as artificial intelligence (nay–life), the relationship between identity and the human face, the differences between the creator of the story and its listener, the question of human agency.

In fact, the play has so many ideas that you might occasionally consider yourself at a university lecture, or several university lectures combined into one, delivered not by dry, monotone-weary professors much in need of classes in vocal projection and articulation, but by two characters (or “quasi-characters” — but I'll get to that later) engaged in a therapy session.



Mónica López-González and Peg Nichols. Photo courtesy of La Petite Noiseuse Productions.

*In Session* (originally written in French and titled *Chez L'Analyste*) is the theatre of ideas pushed to its extreme.

In Aristotle's *Poetics* ideas in drama rest upon the pyramid of plot and character, built out of language to be sure and provided emotional tenor by music and plasticity by spectacle, but given material force in the dynamics of a plot's action and its characters' ethical choices. Modern dramas play with the balance of those relationships, but the essential building blocks remain viable.

Most significantly, in the modern era, the importance of spectacle has increased ten-fold. Considered by Aristotle as better left in the labyrinth of each reader's imagination (where for literature it still resides), in today's theatre spectacle is used to launch, frame, and organize dramatic ideas; its importance is recognized as paramount.

What you see might not be what you get, but it's definitely how you get it.

The language and ideas of Mónica López-González's *In Session* have much to offer an audience in search of mental stimulation. Articulate and layered, its dialogue explores the complex relationship between story teller or creator and story listener or interpreter.

The facts are one set of “things”; the story, or how someone fits the facts together, is another “thing” all together.

This two-character play presents us with a Therapist, played stoically by Peg Nichols, and a Client, played with sinister intent by Mónica López-González, who also directed the production.

At the center of the play, and the drama’s most beautifully written and performed section, is an extended monologue delivered with clarity and restraint by Nichols’ Therapist. She tells the story of a young male patient, with whom she met in session for eight years. He had made wonderful progress, with his creative being coming to life in front of her eyes. Then, inexplicably, on a bridge in Paris, once again in front of her eyes, the young man exposes his ruse by committing suicide; and the Therapist’s worldview collapses.

Within that monologue, delivered simply and directly, the interplay of action, choice, and idea is profound. The human dimensions of the Therapist emerge as she struggles to understand the story and its enactor and the person for whom it was enacted.

López-González’s Client, a plastic surgeon with a troubled past and present, has no such character revealing moment, however. Cloaked in mystery and shrouded with a menacing smirk, she might have been the upper class parallel to Edward Albee’s Jerry from *Zoo Story*, as her intent seems to be to destroy the Therapist, or perhaps just her role as listener and interpreter. The Client arrogantly probes her Therapist with counter-questions and provocative glances.

Introduced at the opening of the play as the victim of a horrible family home accident, with a neighbor oddly audio taping the destruction of her house, the impact of that terror is soon forgotten as the Client recounts older traumas and a recurring nightmare.

A bit of role playing offers a short respite from the generally static stage picture, as Client becomes doctor and Therapist becomes patient.

In the end the Therapist does, indeed, become a teller and creator. Yet, the play fails to resonate with the full implications of that action.

In the program, a third character, a Pianist, whom we never see (until the curtain call), is played by Todd Simon. (Or perhaps I should say that the piano is played by Todd Simon, a character.) We hear his compelling and synchronized music as if it were coming from an onstage radio.

I couldn’t help but wonder how the dynamics of the production might have changed if Simon’s talented Pianist had, indeed, been a character, on stage to interact with the other characters, not with words but with improvised, kinesthetically lucid musical expressions. I say this because, when his music is first introduced in the play, it elicited from López-González’s Client her only intense, yet joyful moment, as if bliss had once guided her life not the solipsistic travails of her current position as plastic surgeon. I yearned for a deeper exploration of that moment.

The fact that Mónica López-González took on the playwright, the director, and the lead actor roles in the play definitely contributed to the diffusion of the drama’s possible impact. The complexity of this type of theatre and its various semiotic elements demand a more thoroughly engaged objective eye.

A camera can help but it cannot replace the collaborative and orchestrated creativity of the theatre’s rehearsal process.

*In Session* is the work of La Petite Noiseuse Productions, whose mission is to merge “the Arts with the Cognitive and Brain Sciences by unleashing the creative potential of our minds to conceive of unique and original contemporary film and live theatrical productions.”

Such a mission is indeed worthy. The intersection between science and art, particularly neuroscience and performance, offers a potentially rich field for discovery. Academia’s resistance to interdisciplinary work, its over-

reliance on logocentric methodologies and perspectives, and its general lack of respect for performance as a field of study make those discoveries even more challenging.

Running Time: 90 minutes, without an intermission.



**WORLD PREMIERE**

**In Session**  
By **Mónica López-González**  
May 29 - June 14, 2015  
**La Petite Noiseuse Productions**

**Live Piano Improvisation!**  
**BUY TICKETS NOW!**

...as minds mimic machines

***In Session*** completes its run at Swirnow Theatre on Sunday, June 14, at 3:00, but it will be performed cabaret style at Germano's Piattini – 300 High Street, in Baltimore, MD, on June 19 and 20, 2015 at 6:00. Click [here](#) for tickets.

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