



Rousuck's Review: In "Framed Illusion," The Art -- And Science -- Of Perception

By J. WYNN ROUSUCK ·

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Linda Bancroft, Mónica López-González square off in 'Framed Illusion'

CREDIT MÓNICA LÓPEZ-GONZÁLEZ, PHD

a woman. She was arrested at a party held to celebrate a book about – and supposedly written by -- a prominent, but notorious man.

A windowless room, a few hardback chairs and a table with a bare bulb overhead. A female police Detective interrogates a murder suspect.

The Suspect is also

He's identified only as "the president," though whether that refers to the political or corporate world is left unsaid. Now he's been murdered. The Suspect was his ghostwriter. Was she also his killer? Does she have something to hide? Does the Detective?

Human communication has its limitations. And, when people deliberately conceal information – at a police interrogation, for example – understanding may boil down to a matter of perception.

Perception -- and its flaws -- is the central theme of *Framed Illusion*. This latest work by [La Petite Noiseuse Productions](#) is premiering at the [Theatre Project](#). The one-act play is written, directed and stars the company's artistic and scientific director, [Mónica López-González](#).

"Scientific director" isn't a term typically associated with theater. But López-González isn't a typical theater artist. She's also a cognitive scientist. *Framed Illusion* is the concluding installment in her trilogy of plays focusing creativity, musical improvisation and multilingualism.

Each play has two characters accompanied by live music, improvised on the spot, in response to the dialogue. The result is a little like chamber music, in which two of the parts are spoken.

Framed Illusion has the look and feel of film noir. The furniture and clothing are mostly black; the Suspect wears a cocktail dress with a skirt as silvery gray as the silver screen.

Bass player **Alexander R. Fournier** and trumpeter **Nicolas A. Sarbanes** enhance the noir feeling with an improvised score that changes with each performance, but ranges from jazz to sounds approximating a car horn, a siren or, at one point, a cacophony of voices in the Suspect's head.

About halfway into the hour-long play, the balance of power shifts, and the music becomes louder and more insistent. This shift builds gradually, but it doesn't come as a surprise.

From the beginning, **Linda Bancroft** portrays the Suspect as cocky. She's not happy about the arrest, but doesn't seem overly concerned about being accused of murder. In body language and expressions, she's more at ease than the Detective. Occasionally, she even laughs.

In contrast, López-González's Detective is almost unrelentingly severe, and there's something about the way her officious character lords it over the Suspect that seems a bit forced.

A few other elements in the production also feel forced. At least twice, the Detective makes an overt statement of the play's theme. In one case, she looks at the audience and says: "Don't you love how inconsistent our perceptions are?" Later she tell us: "It's all about perception." The Detective also delivers a near manifesto on correcting gender inequities.

Themes of feminism and misogyny also figure into the play. And though the major plot twist may not be a shocker, watching the Detective and Suspect feint and parry holds the audience's interest as our perceptions shift and change.

The previous installments of López-González's trilogy were set in a cabaret and a psychiatrist's office. The multilingual component is that each was written in a different language – Spanish, French or Italian. The first was performed with English surtitles; the dialogue in the other two is in English. For audiences attending these two, the multilingual component isn't evident.

There's a sense of unreality underlying *Framed Illusion*, beginning with the word "illusion" in the title. Is what we're watching intended to be realistic – or a metaphorical commentary on understanding and perception? For that matter, is *Framed Illusion* a work of theater or science? Maybe both. I guess it depends on what you perceive.

-- J. Wynn Rousuck

La Petite Noiseuse's production of Framed Illusion continues at the Theatre Project through June 12 and at the Cabaret at Germano's on June 17 and 18

*To listen to Tom Hall's May 27th interview with playwright **Mónica López-González**, click [here](#).*

Audio for this segment will be available by noon today.

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