

**AISLE SAY San Francisco**

# **A PICASSO**

**By Jeffrey Hatcher**

**Presented by San Jose Repertory Theatre**

**Directed by Jonathan Moscone**

**At San Jose Repertory Theatre**

**101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA / (408) 367-7255**

**Reviewed by [Judy Richter](#)**

As the lights go down, an old newsreel of Adolph Hitler and his Nazi troops entering Paris is shown on a stage curtain. As the curtain rises, the newsreel continues, projecting onto the back wall of an underground vault as a man opens a door and descends a long staircase (set by **Erik Flatmo** with lighting by **Japhy Weideman**). Thus begins **San Jose Repertory Theatre's** production of **Jeffrey Hatcher's "A Picasso,"** an intermissionless drama pitting art against oppression in Paris in late October 1941. The man is artist Pablo Picasso (**James Carpenter**). He is soon joined by a woman, Miss Fischer (**Carrie Paff**), from the Nazi ministry of culture. She has been ordered to get Picasso to check three portraits that were confiscated from people, presumably Jews, who fled Paris ahead of the Germans. She asks him to verify whether they're really his or if they're copies. If any are authentic, they are to go into an exhibition of "degenerate" art that will then be burned.

What follows is a verbal cat-and-mouse game between the temperamental Picasso and the determined Miss Fischer. It also turns into something of a sexually provocative dance between them as Picasso insinuates himself closer to her. While there is much discussion about the background of the three portraits, Miss Fischer begins to reveal some vulnerability. The Nazi regime has retained her because of she is an expert on 20th century art in general and Picasso in particular. She says that if she doesn't do as she's told, her parents could be endangered.

Costumes by **Meg Neville** contrast the two personalities with Picasso in somewhat casual beige, complete with beret, and Miss Fischer in a more severe black dress. The sound is by **Jeff Mockus**. Despite the play's tendency toward talkiness, **Jonathan Moscone's** keen direction and the two actors' outstanding performances maintain the suspense and tension, occasionally leavened by witty one-liners, usually from Picasso. The result is a thought-provoking look at the importance of art and the artist in society.

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