



## Entertainment :: Theatre

### Trysts In Toledo

by Christopher Soden  
EDGE Contributor  
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Lydia Mackay, Ginneh Thomas and Gregory Lush in "Trysts in Toledo" at Theatre Three.

Brimming with lunacy, folly and wry social commentary, **Trysts in Toledo** is a 17th Century comedy of manners, written by Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, considered the first feminist of Mexico.

Cruz belonged to a sisterhood of nuns, and was highly educated, articulate and something of a visionary. She was an accomplished and formidable writer of poetry and prose and spent much of her time in scholarly pursuits, when she wasn't tormenting the church hierarchy or challenging the status quo. Her sensitivity to the caste system of her day, whether you were male, female, aristocracy or serving class, was the inspiration for "Trysts in Toledo,"

along with a penchant for skewering pompousness, hypocrisy and male bravado.

Whatever cleverness in Cruz's repartee was lost in translation, she had a sharp eye for the inanity and belabored conventions of polite society. More than once, Dona Ana, the play's heroine, bewails the "drama" that comes from being wealthy and privileged. In this realm, everything is forgivable but unseemly behavior. The elaborate machinations of the numerous characters, all poised for romance (or at least some ardent love-making) bear out Ana's keen observations. Disguises, ruses, mistaken identities, pointless errands, lofty speeches and dire threats abound, all for the sake of reconciling propriety with consummation. Finding reciprocated love is only the first obstacle. Ending up with the one who truly excites your passion would seem to be more daunting than hunting tigers with a hatpin.

"Trysts in Toledo" begins late one Spring evening in 1661, in the main room of the spacious home of Dona Ana and her brother, Don Pedro. Celia, the maid, is party to a scheme that will aid Don Pedro, the master of the house, in his pursuit of Dona Leonor. Two servants, bribed to impersonate cops, will supposedly arrest Leonor's fiance, while depositing her at Pedro's house till he returns from a trip, later that night. Don Pedro will then proceed to declare his undying devotion to Leonor, thus "wooing" her away from her lover. After that it gets complicated. As you might expect, the rest of the story arises from complications and the occasional digression or two. Cruz owes something of a debt to Shakespeare's comedic structure (down to the ending dance) but "Trysts" is somewhat smarter if less subtle. A riff if you will.

The cast delivers with aplomb and zeal and lots of giddy energy. Jeff Swearingen (as Castano) does an extended, inspired drag transformation number unlike any I've ever seen. After stripping down to his trousers he seeks help from the audience members (Lucky me!) while adjusting the accoutrements of gender bending. Swearingen really works it, with tremendous, hilarious results: extolling the rush of getting so much male attention simply by putting on a dress. His interpretation has less to do with camp than with gender politics and it is top notch.

Aleisha Force as the clever housemaid, Celia, is like a force of nature. Struggling to keep ahead of the game, whirling like a cyclone. Force is entertaining and a pleasure to watch, tickling us with her jibes and predicaments. Lydia Mackay has the very special gift of combining patrician allure with comic exasperation. Her demeanor is charismatic, filled with combustion and frailty and grace. Mackay can play aristocracy while making Dona Ana very human and witty with manic desire. Gregory Lush as Ana's brother Don Pedro has great presence and cunning asides. He knows how to send-up swashbuckling and still makes it genuine.

Bruce Coleman's costume design is vibrant and sumptuous, bubbling with elegant hues and textures. Coleman pulls in lots of disparate patterns and coordinates them into a collage of cut and patina that is cool and scintillating. The set design by Jeffrey Schmidt was marvelous. Making the most of the space he had to work with, Schmidt has created numerous settings that dovetail nicely with the living room at the hub.

Schmidt has exploited the 17th Century Mexican milieu with subdued panache. There's an evanescent, smoky, dreamlike quality to the gathering that suggests a painting, nearly, with its candelabras, goblets, flowers, apples, shiny metals, dark wood, capturing the earthy grandeur of Latin culture.

Theatre Three presents **Trysts in Toledo** By Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz playing through January 18th. For more information call : 214-871-3300 or check out [their website](#).

*Christopher Soden received his MFA in Poetry from Vermont College in 2005. He is a teacher, lecturer, actor, performer and playwright. In addition he writes film, theatre and literary critique. In his spare time he likes to read, cook, dine, do crossword puzzles, chill and nap.*

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