

## Fringe Review

### Amsterdam Fringe 2012

The Story of the Einstein Girl

**Genre: Drama**



**Venue:** [Rozentheater](#)

### Low Down

When a young woman awakes in the woods outside Berlin in 1932, she cannot remember who she is. Only an advertisement that she is holding of a lecture by Albert Einstein offers a clue in the search for her identity. *The Story of The Einstein Girl* is inspired by Philip Sington's novel *The Einstein Girl*.

### Review

Annemarie Hagenaar has combined her studies in physics and astronomy with her education as a performer. This 'experiment' has turned out very well. *The Story of the Einstein Girl* is the first theatre production that she has written, produced and stars in. It is notable that there are two different versions of this performance, while the script remains the same. This review is of the version directed by Sylvia Weening (NL). The version by director Michael Luggio (US) can be seen on 7 and 8 September at the Amsterdam Fringe Festival.

The performance tells a remarkable story, combining physics theory and semi-fiction, about the known and unknown legacies of one of the greatest physicists of the last century – Albert Einstein. The unknown legacy was a daughter born out of wedlock. No one knows what happened to this girl, but Annemarie Hagenaar imagines a way for her to come into existence. She starts by explaining to the audience what she sets out to do.

The performance relies mostly on the text, delivered by Hagenaar's beautiful acting and diction. The *mise-en-scene* is simple, with only some changes in costume. The actress seems to move according to set patterns around the space, marking changes in time, space or states of mind. The lighting is a stable bluish colour. The audience finds itself travelling through the depths of the woman's mind, which seems to be threatened to be sucked into a black hole that swallows all reality. Liserl, as she may be called, is both brilliant and mad, right there in front of us and yet unpredictable. There are poetic passages where her mind seems to be taken over by insights into theories of physics. Light, speed, black holes and other dazzling phenomena occupy her and lead to other insights into her personal history and present state of being. Somehow she puzzles her identity together again, but never as a coherent whole. She remains an enigma.

Determining her final identity like an equation that has to be solved, turns out to be as difficult as finding Schrödinger's cat alive. She is both Liserl and Mariya and she is nobody at all. At the same time, she is an actress and her character and yet neither. These are fascinating parallels.

A minor drawback is that the story seems, along the way, to be too hermetically sealed, especially the parallels relating to the men in her life. The fact that both 'fathers' abuse their daughter, make the story feel manufactured, as though Liserl's life should fit the theories she believes in. If this were presented as a possible psychological mechanism instead of 'true' pieces of the puzzle, it could be more palpable. This could also be due to the calm physicality of the performance. Only the eyes and small gestures reveal a hint of trauma without ever breaking into madness or anger. This is done very skilfully, and the rationality might fit with the stereotype of the scientist as an observer, an objective seeker of truth, but it leaves you with the unfulfilled feeling that you haven't seen the real emotional depth of the character(s).

In the end Liserl's conclusion about who she is leaves room for other parallel universes. It makes you think about the possibilities of 'finding yourself through losing yourself' and of inhabiting multiple realities at once. It will be very interesting to see how the second version of *The Story of the Einstein Girl* deals with the ingenious script. I hope that in her future productions Hagenaar will continue working on the exciting 'discovery' of an alchemy combining science, theatre and psychology.

Reviewed by Lonneke van Heugten 3 September 2012

**Website :**

[amsterdamfringefestival](#)

[www.annemariehagenaars.nl](http://www.annemariehagenaars.nl)