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# THE ADVOCATE



## Appoggiatura: love and loss in Venice

Posted By Jared Quaglieri on Feb 4, 2015 in Art Walk, InFocus

### Drama At Denver Center for the Performing Arts

“Appoggiatura” is a music term taken from the Italian verb appoggiare, meaning “to lean upon.” It is also the title of a play written by James Still that will be showing at the DCPA’s Ricketson Theatre until February 22. The word ties the play to its setting in Venice, its use of classical Italian music, and its themes of comfort and resolution in dealing with loss.

Three closely-related Americans come to Venice on vacation to make one last trip in favor of Gordon, a man who’d recently succumbed to Alzheimer’s before finally passing away and a man with close ties to all three travellers.

In the city, which the play depicts with a simple backdrop of old stone buildings and a modest use of various video projections, the three will learn about loss in a city of love. Along they way, they will encounter a trio of bards who are certainly more than meets the eye and a tour guide who, the audience is quick to suspect, might just be making Venetian history up on the fly.

The production currently running in Denver has a cast of only seven actors, each stepping in and out of what adds up to nearly two dozen roles.

An even blend of funnies and sincerity, the production plays with the hearts of its audience. The greatest comedy comes at the sake of Aunt Chuck’s (Rob Nagle) frustration—and poor attempts at speaking Italian—as well as local “travel guider” Marco’s (Nick Mills) broken English and warm, lovable sincerity. Family matriarch Helen (Darrie Lawrence) guides audiences through the past to look at some of the most awe-inspiring memories and moments of



Mehry Eslamina, Paul Bentzen, and Julian Remulla perform a musical interlude in DCPA's *Appoggiatura*.  
photo courtesy of Denver Center for the Performing Arts

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Magic realism thrives in the simple Venetian set; time bends and memories replay themselves, and the mysterious bards slide on and offstage playing guitars, lutes, harmonicas, and violins.

If the play has a fault, it's that the story line of one of the characters seems to be brushed under the rug. After all, in a production as ambitious as this, tying up every loose end is a difficult pitfall to avoid. Lenne Klingaman is one actor who carries multiple roles, and near the end of the play her character Sylvie, whose story of heartbreak with her girlfriend the audience experiences via Skype calls, disappears.

Nevertheless, the production remains sincere, touching, and, to be blunt, magical. Every actor is performing his or her heart out, delivering humorous lines with a sharp snappiness and disparaged lines with sincerity and control. This fistful of dynamic performers and their simple set can somehow take audiences on a personal tour of the flooded city, gondola and all.