

# 'Losing Sleep' may keep you thinking long after lights go out

**Amy Stumpfl**, For The Tennessean 10:06 a.m. CDT September 13, 2016



(Photo: Griffin Dunn)

## Theater review

We've all been there before — tossing and turning, desperate for just a little bit of shut-eye. And as anyone who has suffered with insomnia can attest, a lack of sleep can lead to some serious soul-searching and mind tricks. But Diana Grisanti's "The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep" takes that concept to a whole new level with dark humor and thought-provoking results.

The story follows Ada, a customer service rep with a thirst for justice and a wicked case of insomnia. Ada has a history of jumping in to defend those in need, whether it's a classmate from divinity school or a stranger on the other end of the telephone line. But things go terribly wrong when she gets involved with a desperate woman in Florida, sending Ada into a sleep-deprived tailspin of guilt and regret.

It may sound complicated, but Grisanti (writer-in-residence at Vanderbilt University) has crafted an oddly engaging tale, which runs just under two hours with no intermission. There are plenty of laughs along the way,

but this "Saint" also has some serious things to say about the way women interact in corporate America, academia and beyond.

Leah Lowe (chair of Vanderbilt's Theater Department) directs a solid cast, anchored by Jennifer Richmond as Ada. It's a challenging role, and one that keeps Richmond on stage at all times, navigating rapid-fire scene changes and steadily building tension. She hits all the right notes, bringing a nice "everywoman" quality to the role.

Tamiko Robinson Steele also succeeds, taking on multiple roles, from a stylish self-help guru to a sympathetic college adviser. She earns big laughs as Dr. Carol Newbauer, handing out sage advice with a knowing smile and infomercial flair.

Austin Olive is quite likable as Ada's upbeat co-worker, while Sejal Mehta makes a strong impression as both Ada's boss and a condescending college dean. Mehta's Dean Dunlop is particularly cool and calculating, reminding us that there's often a steep price to be paid for intervening on another's behalf.

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The dual casting approach creates an especially intriguing dynamic for Jay Lovell and Madeline Marconi, as they portray two very different — but equally unsettling — power struggles. Although their roles veer toward well-worn stereotypes, both Lovell and Marconi make the most of their time on stage.

Meanwhile, Lowe makes fine use of the intimate space, with audiences facing each other in an alley arrangement. But it would be nice to see more in the way of design. Richard K. Davis' lighting helps guide the eye, while projections add interest. But the stark set doesn't really match up with the play's highly imaginative tone. It's a minor concern — certainly not the sort of thing to keep you up at night.

Then again, "The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep" just may keep you thinking long after the lights go out.

#### **If you go**

**What:** Actors Bridge Ensemble presents the Nashville premiere of "The Patron Saint of Losing Sleep." (Contains adult language.)

**When:** Through Sept. 18. Performances at 7 p.m. Thursdays-Sundays.

**Where:** Actors Bridge Studio at Darkhorse Chapel, 4610 Charlotte Ave. (entrance on 47th Avenue)

**Tickets:** \$25, \$30 at the door

**Contact:** <https://patronsaint.eventbrite.com> (<https://patronsaint.eventbrite.com/>)

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