



# 'Photograph 51' debuts at Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre

by Bob Evans



Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre

Never produced before in the Kansas City Metro area, "Photograph 51" shines light into the 1950s research and ground-breaking discoveries in DNA mapping and understanding with brilliant performances by Amy Attaway and Robert Gibby Brand.

Rosalind Franklin, science smart, studies and calculates DNA structure through a series of photographs that help to identify and unravel the mystery of DNA. Photograph 51 is the name of the particular image she captures on film that displays the double-helix. As a female in the 1950s her

research goes mostly unnoticed—other than in scientific circles. Franklin's research helped her team and colleagues win the Noble Peace Prize in 1962. Franklin died several years prior to the award which is only bestowed on living persons.

## Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre



Even though the crux of the story is the research and discoveries, the writing and characters give the play its driving focus. The play focuses on the relationships among Franklin, her work team, her adversaries, and her love interest. The relationships give the play the interest level, the comedy, the drama, and the heart that draws the audience to care about Franklin and her plight of being a woman working in a man's world and her struggles to achieve her own notoriety.

Amy Attaway heads the cast as Rosalind Franklin and her interactions and relationships with the male cast members endears her. Attaway gives a strong, focused character with wit and wisdom that can cut any man to the core. Just the right amount of wit and sarcasm adds to the charm of her character.

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As her foil, Robert Gibby Brand give another stunning performance as a scientist who cannot fathom a woman as his equal, yet finds himself at odds with her while admiring her from a safe distance. Their characters collide when Franklin's confidence and findings clash with his male ego. Brand's performances never fail to deliver complex characters.

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The love interest, played by Jordan Fox, admires Franklin from afar. Their letters allow them to develop a distanced relationship until he finally meets her and recognizes her research and endeavors to work with her. Through their association, their relationship grows. Fox gives a carefully constructed character who slowly draws the audience in as the relationship develops. His subtle changes from someone interested in Franklin's research to her love interest evolves slowly. Fox is fun and endearing in the role.

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Others in the cast include, Coleman Crenshaw, R. H. Wilhoit, and John Cleary. All give rock-solid performances and present interesting characters. Their interaction with each other and Franklin make the show so much fun. “Photograph 51” is a beautifully written ensemble piece and without the supporting characters and their interactions, the piece would fail. As it stands, all characters are solid and rounded characters. They are all interesting and they mostly remain on stage at all times.

“Photograph 51” again affirms Karen Paisley always chooses right when assembling a cast for her productions. She seems to foresee the end product and then selects the correct actors for the result she wants. Such is the case again with a strong cast from top to bottom.

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The production staff that bring “Photograph 51” to fruition are James Paisley, stage manager; Karen Paisley, production

design; Elizabeth Bowman, assistant director; Jeff Stoer, projections; Michelle Cowles, assistant stage manager; Shannon Regnier, costume design; Leo Mauler, lighting board; John Story, sound design; Marc Manley, props master. Their combined talents created a cohesive piece that moves and remains tightly structured.



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“Photography 51” continues at the Metropolitan Ensemble Theater through Jan. 29. Tickets can be purchased via the [MET website](#). The play runs 90 minutes with no intermission.

Tags: Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, Theater, Kansas City Theater, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment, “Photograph 51”, Performing Arts