



BWW Review: ELEMENO PEA: Life's a Beach



By Nancy Grossman
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Elemeno Pea

Written by [Molly Smith Metzler](#), Directed by [Shana Gozansky](#); Scenic Design, Jeffrey Petersen; Lighting and Sound Design, [David Wilson](#); Costume Design, [Rachel Padula-Shufelt](#); Stage Manager, Katherine Humbert

CAST: [Lydia Barnett-Mulligan](#), [Samantha Richert](#), [Amanda Collins](#), [Jaime Carrillo](#), Barlow Adamson

Performances through November 19 at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, 949 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA; Box Office 866-811-4111 or www.BostonPlaywrights.org

Sing along: a-b-c-d-e-f-g-h-i-j-k-elemenopea. Takes you back, doesn't it? How many of us thought that was one long name for a letter in the middle of the alphabet? Well, one of the two sisters in [Molly Smith Metzler](#)'s charming, funny play *Elemeno Pea* was convinced of it, and it became a lifelong source of

embarrassment that had a powerful impact on her life choices. Boston Playwrights' Theatre presents the Boston premiere of Metzler's own revision of her 2011 play, set at the end of the summer on Martha's Vineyard, where a couple of blue collar siblings from Buffalo are the proverbial sore thumbs amongst the glad-handers with their pink pants and new money.

Simone ([Lydia Barnett-Mulligan](#)) is living the high life as the personal assistant to wealthy Peter Kell's trophy wife #2, Michaela ([Samantha Richert](#)), enjoying their beach house digs, top shelf alcohol, and a working relationship that makes her feel like family. When her real family comes to visit in the person of big sister Devon ([Amanda Collins](#)), the latter's skepticism rankles Simone and unleashes a flood of unresolved emotions that neither of them expects nor fully understands. Both women are toting some hefty baggage, but their methods of unpacking it all clash as they get caught in the marital tsunami that is about to engulf Michaela. Metaphorically drilling holes in the leaky S.S. Michaela to let the water out is her husband's bff and Simone's boyfriend, Ethan (Barlow Adamson), a clueless dipwad who will stand by a friend unless it is inconvenient. Trying to keep the Kell's property shipshape is their long-suffering Latino groundskeeper Jos-B ([Jaime Carrillo](#)), so-called because they already employed someone named José.

[Shana Gozansky](#) directs with a juggler's aplomb, keeping each of the characters' competing storylines aloft and making sure that everyone gets their due. Although the play centers on the sisters and how they react to each other after a lengthy period of separation, during which something major happened in both lives, Michaela's thread evolves into the most dramatic (read: interesting) plot line. In a quintet of fine performances, Richert stands out while traversing the broadest arc. She ignites sparks of disdain in the audience, fans them into flames of animosity, yet finds a way to reverse course when Metzler throws her character a curve. Actually, the playwright throws a hefty body block at Michaela, knocking her off the rails of her gravy train, and her misfortune elicits empathy from the other characters who never saw it coming. Ditto for the audience reaction, and Richert's transformation is remarkable.

Among the pleasures of *Elemeno Pea* is watching the relationships evolve and witnessing the unexpected developments. Metzler's script is beautifully constructed and, even when something surprises us, nothing feels gratuitous or haphazardly thrown in for effect. The story is very much character-driven and the actors get inside of these people to show us who they are. Jeffrey Petersen's scenic design for the beach house is authentic, right down to the crushed sea shells surrounding the perimeter of the stage, and [David Wilson's](#) lighting and sound design provide the ambience of the sunset and the roll of the ocean. [Rachel Padula-Shufelt](#) does a great job of distinguishing the characters by class and station with her costume designs. On the heels of their 36th season-opener *Lost Tempo*, Boston Playwrights' Theatre is two for two with this production. I can't wait for March, 2018, when they present the world premiere of [Walt McGough's](#) *Brawler*, in collaboration with Kitchen Theatre Company and directed by KTC's Producing Artistic Director and old Boston friend, M. [Bevin O'Gara](#).

Photo credit: Kalman Zabarsky ([Lydia Barnett-Mulligan](#), [Amanda Collins](#))

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