

The New England Theatre Geek

Women Gone Wild: “Beasts” at BPT

Posted on [April 12, 2022](#) by [Kitty Drexel](#)



Clara Francesca, Caroline Emily Calkins; Photos by Stratton McCrady

Presented by [Boston Playwrights' Theatre](#)

by Cayenne Douglass

Directed by Kelly Galvin

Fight choreography by Ryan Winkles

Online [Playbill](#)

April 7-17, 2022

[Boston Playwrights' Theatre](#)

949 Commonwealth Ave.
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Review by Kitty Drexel

BOSTON — There is nothing more hardcore than birthing a baby (sorry BASE jumpers). It's not "the most beautiful thing I've ever experienced" as my own father put it. Babies are metal AF.

Just like many other XXXtreme tasks, delivering and rearing a baby doesn't come naturally to many mothers. Maternal instincts require hard work: research, doctor visits, mommy groups, prenatal yoga, therapy, emotional and physical labor. *Beasts* by Cayenne Douglass explores the psyche of pregnancy. It takes a deep dive into what it means to be gestating a human parasite.

Fran (Caroline Emily Calkins) and Judy (Clara Francesca) are sisters with a tense relationship. Fran is deeply pregnant. She and Judy navigate their relationship under new strain when Judy comes home unannounced.

Doula and wellness coach Amelia (Katherine Schaber) loves Judy's essence and tolerates Fran's employment. Fran's husband Jim (Matthew Bretschneider) looks like the kind of man who will call it babysitting when he watches his own kid.

Douglass writes in her "Note from the Playwright" that *Beasts* came from "three days at the beginning of the pandemic in a fire fit storm that made my brain hurt and my fingers ache." The play is about the chaos of womanhood, the "bestial instincts, rage, action that women experience" that aren't portrayed in movies and books.

Douglass' words sound like they came from [Women Who Run With the Wolves](#) by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés. The women in *Beasts* are like pregnant archetypes sprung from its pages. They are Wild Women, loose, untamed. Here to break houses. Not to be housebroken.

Speaking of housebreaking: *Beasts* is holding back. It begins in a relatively concrete state in which people and their relationships make sense. It devolves into an abstract state over 60-ish minutes. The last 30-ish minutes explore a pregnant person's most earthy, natural experiences.

I say, give people (women and femmes) what they want. Start in abstraction, and hit the oddity from every angle until it and we're exhausted. I'm not suggesting that *Beasts* should be a 90-minute Wild Woman free-for-all with its characters cackling around a hag's campfire (although, that would be rad). Rather, *Beasts* might explore the absurdity of women's relationships amidst the absurdity of a modern pro-hetero sex, anti-parenting society that demands women work like they don't have kids and parent like they don't have a job.



Katherine Schaber, Caroline Emily Calkins; Photos by Stratton McCrady.

At the moment, *Beasts* is telling truths. It isn't exploring how absolutely absurd it is that these things are true. (I know at least three mothers who would stab their partner in the eye right now for their workplace to offer affordable healthcare. It's not even absurd that their partners would let them. The absurd part is that the men's bathroom still wouldn't have a changing station.)

Francesca and Calkins delve into a fraught but loving sisterhood. They are bookends of each other. Together they make one complete person. Separate, they're constantly but unintentionally pushing each other's buttons. It makes their foray into *Wild Womanhood* more striking. They can love and appreciate each other more (better?) when in their basest selves. It's sad that it takes such great lengths.

Schaber as Amelia steals every scene she's in. She balances high class marketing guru with bohemian aesthetics. Schaber is hilarious because she's utterly serious.

I mean it when I say Matthew Bretschneider as Jim is loathsome in the best way. Jim is the kind of guy who assumes that fatherhood is as easy as making a genetic donation in the right lady-place. Jim has never brought a woman to orgasm and finds nothing wrong with that. Bretschneider as Jim exudes confidence. Jim makes my skin crawl.

Fran, Judy, and Amelia are the embodiment of the triune goddess: maiden, mother, crone but not in that order. A maiden is virginal; she's pure. A mother hasn't necessarily had children; she can be a caregiver. A crone isn't necessarily old; she's wise and competent.

Society and its marketers propel the false image that birth, like rearing, is wondrous, that maternity is instinctual and natural. The body-horrors and chaos of birth are swept under a proverbial rug. Not so in *Beasts*.

A viewer doesn't need to be pregnant to appreciate this play. They don't have to identify as a woman either. Men who identify as men should see this play and talk to their lady friends after.

The internet gives...

<https://youtu.be/NDvaRF4HQHQ>

...And the internet takes.

<https://youtu.be/EShUeudtaFg>

<https://www.nettheatregeek.com/2022/04/12/women-gone-wild-beasts-at-bpt/>