

OFF BROADWAY

Not Your Grandma's Theatre

The 2007 EstroGenius Festival

Week Two

Theatre Reviews by [Cindy Pierre](#)

The Eighth Annual EstroGenius Festival is anchored by four rotating programs of short plays. The short play performances are at 8:00 pm Wednesdays through Fridays and at 7:00 pm and 9:30 pm on Saturdays, September 19 through October 13 at Manhattan Theatre Source.

SAGUARO

Dating in 2007 can be pretty brutal. It's a minefield where the wrong partner is likely to take off an emotional leg, or at the very least, slow you down on your way to the "one." Philip Dawkins proposes an interspecies solution with *Saguaro*. When Wren (Julie Fitzpatrick) has exhausted all of her options to find a mate, she turns to.....get ready for it....plant life!! While at a wedding for her bosses, Wren meets prickly, stable, and dry bachelor Saguaro, a tall cactus plant in a bow tie. Yes, a bow tie. Saguaro is the perfect boyfriend at first: he's a great listener because he never interrupts, he doesn't lay a hand on Wren until she's ready, and he is quite comfortable allowing her to take the dominant role in clothing him and dragging him to social events. Her best friend Kira (Amelia Campbell) does her best to be non-judgmental as the passion develops between Wren and Saguaro, opting instead to inquire about Saguaro's sexual prowess and mannerisms. Wren soon learns that her new romance is not bug-free.

Saguaro is a witty and funny spectacle of dating gone wrong. Although I had originally anticipated a metaphorical cactus, I was pleasantly surprised to see Dawkins pursue a tongue-in-cheek story about a "firmly planted" man. The production runs smoothly, with the exception of one particular light cue between the first and second scenes that is too sharp and doesn't allow for enough time for Wren's fall from sobriety. **Fitzpatrick and Campbell have wonderful chemistry as bosom buddies**, with Fitzpatrick's poker face bouncing against Campbell's knowing glances. Apart from a gym scene where Fitzpatrick appears to lapse out of motion on a treadmill, she is completely committed to showing a sympathetic character who is desperate to escape the single life under **Shannon Ward's strong direction**. *Saguaro* will have you laughing and wondering what single women will do next.

KID SISTER

Kid Sister by Carrie Louise Nutt is a look at sibling envy and role model worship gone awry. It is a matter-of-fact discussion about bulimia between bulimic Diana (Zazie Beetz) and her younger sister, Iris (Dominique Fishback). The play opens with a vomiting Diana, and a pleading Iris to teach her the ways of bingeing without the cost.

The play would be sad if it weren't for the wonderful dynamic between Beetz and Fishback. Director Lanie Zipoy elicits sharp, funny, energetic and controlled performances from her 16-year old co-stars. **The writing by Nutt is raw and honest**, and will strike a chord with anyone who emulates another. The only issue is that the visuals do not coincide with the text.

As Iris, Fishback is supposedly fat and looking for a solution when she begs Diana to show her the great barf way. However, both actresses are lean, and there isn't even an attempt to distinguish their weights.

Kid Sister is a disturbing look at the power of influence and distortion. **The natural writing, coupled with the strong, startling performances from the young cast, create an engaging, thought-provoking experience.**

I HAVE IT

George (Thomas Rowen) and Lady (Caroline Parsons) have something crucial in common: HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). It is under this umbrella that they meet for a blind date at the park. Lady's eccentricities put George out of sorts, but he still finds her fetching. Lady, in turn, enjoys being unpredictable and interesting with a healthy dollop of neurotic. They deliberate over the particulars of their association between furtive glances and nervous chuckles.

I Have It is a sweet story about common ground and common dreams. Their stories, particularly Lady's and the details of her contracting the virus, are recognizable for sympathy and beauty. **Parsons and Rowen capture anxieties, insecurities, and embarrassment well, not only for the blind date in itself, but for the heavier undertone that the date carries.** They are aware of their environment, and use the fourth wall well to mask their shame in the middle of the park. Optimism could have easily flown away, but the cast nets hope well and creates romance where it is sorely needed. *I Have It* is a timely play that addresses a burgeoning problem gingerly and candidly.

PARENTS OF TYPICAL CHILDREN

A geneticist, Dr. Laurel (Denise Collins), delivers a terrible blow to the egos of two parents: their expected child will be an average kid with an average life in Michelle Markarian's *Parents of Typical Children*. Oh, the horror! Overachievers Mr. Downer (William Kozy) and Mrs. Downer (Helene Galek) can't fathom that their genes will produce a regular joe, and as they go through the stages of acceptance, their antics increase. This satire takes a look at when a healthy, normal baby is not enough, and the craziness that ensues.

Markarian carefully crafts a story where problems are invented, and good fortune is ignored. **The cast is enthusiastic and spirited. *Parents of Typical Children* is great fun for those who perpetually want more, and the ones who laugh at them.**

THE CURSE OF THE HORNED BABBY

Where have all the good men gone? Why, the horned babby has eaten them, of course! And according to two wives and a crone telling tales, he can come back at any minute and snatch a Minstrel (Ridley Parson) passing through the town. Lisa Dillman's *The Curse of the Horned Babby* is prime material for the upcoming Halloween season. A minstrel (medieval poet and musician) encounters Cobblers Wife (Franny Silverman), Bakers Wife (Alison Saltz) and Crone (Amy Dickenson) as they collect the booty from the horned babby's (a demonic baby) exploits and murders. From there, they decide to regale him with the story of a devil child that may or may not fly, and may or may not have eaten their men.

The period costumes for *The Curse of the Horned Babby* transport us to medieval times with ease, and the spot-on accents of the cast put a nail in the time travel. **Under Heidi Handelsman's precise direction, the cast deliver outstanding performances.** As Cobblers wife, Franny Silverman is especially brilliant with the meatiest role as the lead storyteller.

Although this play is as strong as the ones that precede it, it's a peculiar choice to close the night because of its theme and genre. Even though each of Week 2's plays teeter on or jump into the absurd, *The Curse of the Horned Babby* is a departure from the rest that takes a different kind of leap. It may be a strange ending to this production, but it is also a hilarious and fantastic display of skill.
