

OFF BROADWAY

Not Your Grandma's Theatre

The 2007 EstroGenius Festival Week Four

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, through October 13 at Manhattan Theatre Source.

Fetus Envy

If you're looking for court theater that's high on energy but low on substance, then Melissa Maxwell's *Fetus Envy* is your ticket to entertainment. *Fetus Envy* pops from the beginning with a manic introduction to the court case: a woman (Jeanette Bonner) is accused of murder, and vehemently denies her culpability well before the delayed disclosure of the details. She is being tried for having a miscarriage because society, in the form of the Prosecuting Attorney (Charlie Fersko), does not believe that she did everything in her power to carry the baby to term. It doesn't help that the Prosecuting Attorney's key witness, her husband, Man (Vincent Marano), corroborates his position by citing two other miscarriages and her insistence on continuing to work throughout the pregnancies.

Seemingly the next step into the future after last week's *Please Remove This Stuffed Animal From My Head* by Crystal Jackson, *Fetus Envy* doesn't fare nearly as well as its predecessor in illustrating the progressive threat to a woman's right to choose. There is simply too much of a likeness to Jerry Springer and Judge Mills Lane shows, and what could have been great tongue in cheek material is instead contrived and desperate. The title *Fetus Envy* is misleading, and doesn't illuminate any core points in the play. By nerves or by inadequate preparation, some of the actors stumble over their dialogue, and never quite appear as if they believe in the merits of the play. The bailiff, a staple in real court proceedings, is played here by Daryl Williams. Unfortunately, he's a sitting duck until he's called to action, and in one instance, he is slow to start. As Woman, Jeanette Bonner strives to no avail, showing some emotional range when responding to her situation, but reacting so strongly in contrast to the rest of the cast's levity that it appears she doesn't remember the play is supposed to be facetious. Yet, the cast's share of the blame is minimal. Despite a fitting ending for this piece and an amusing sequence in which Man swears upon a palm pilot rather than a bible, there is very little in Maxwell's script that is enlightening or engrossing.

Family Time

Siblings Marie (Kate Sessions) and Vinnie (Michael Kaplan) squabble over their mother's comatose body at a hospital in Pamela Danforth Yaco's *Family Time*. The winner for most grounded in reality, *Family Time* is my personal favorite of this week's series.

Vinnie, an adventurer on his third marriage, and Marie, a bored housewife who married rich have difficulty seeing eye to eye on pretty much everything due to the difference in their lifestyles and stations. They do, however, agree that their Mom's (Valerie O'Hara) version of motherly love was questionable at the very least and lousy in truth. Unable to salvage their relationship with their mother, the siblings learn that perhaps it is not too late to patch up their own.

Yaco writes some wonderful, witty banter that comes alive in the hands of Sessions and Kaplan. These two actors have great chemistry, and under the direction of Leslie Cloninger, it is almost more thrilling to root for playful dissent than a resolution. In the midst of the volley of clever quips, however, one cannot help but notice Valerie O'Hara's composure. Although she is least involved in the action, there is great strength in playing an unresponsive body in the middle of the shouting. Technically, the implied TV set should have been placed downstage instead of upstage, and the mom should have been facing downstage. Vinnie sits with his back turned to the audience as he flips through the channels. Although the sound effects are realistic, they are not enough to keep the audience from desiring a face-to-face interaction with him. Also, the heart monitor sound effects are a wonderful device to remind us of location, but they should be a constant as opposed to the carefully placed insertions that they are right now. *Family Time* captures the dysfunctional dynamics of this family well, and shines a light on relationship problems that may be either ignored or incorrectly diagnosed.

For Want of a Shoe

While dining, a couple discovers their difference in opinion on the subjects of cleanliness and propriety in Kristine McGovern's *For Want of a Shoe*. When feisty and outspoken Laurie (a fantastic Tina Chilip) remarks that she has lost her shoe under the table, obsessive-compulsive date Paul (Michael J. Connolly) immediately breaks into both emotional and physical hives. But it's not the loss of her property that is distressing him. Paul is aghast that Laurie is the sort that would even think about mixing food with that type of comfort, for he simply can't stand the thought of feet being near his vittles. Laurie's unhygienic display even threatens the future of their relationship. Paul calls on the Waitress (Christine M. Burnett) to solve their shoe problem, but winds up with much more instead.

For Want of a Shoe is a bizarre and zany comedy that experiments with comfort levels and the sometimes passive disparities in class. The cast fill their roles well, with Paul's reservations contrasting well against Laurie's wantonness. Chilip is especially fun as the carefree Laurie who can't decide whether to be outraged or amused, and sometimes gives in to both. Although the ending is too predictable for what could have continued as an introspective look into a dining caste system, *For Want of a Shoe* does boast good performances under Esther M. Neff's direction. It also contemplates in a humorous way what happens when couples don't want the same things out of life, or in this case, their meal.

Red Carpet

A blind date for a high-profile, red carpet event between an established star and a young, impressionable actress goes horribly awry in Kristina Romero's *Red Carpet*. Laura (Alli Loeffert) waits patiently and nervously in a limousine for Lou (Samuel Whitten) to arrive, counting the blessings that were given to her by Lou's agent to be his arm candy. Laura doesn't realize exactly what she signed up for, however, until Lou arrives, tardy and flippant, to begin the date of her life.

Although Romero's script is not noteworthy, every word is punctuated with great performances by Loeffert and Whitten. As Laura, Alli Loeffert delivers an innocence that begins far earlier than any lines of dialogue. She is charming, and infuses her character with blonde Betty Boopisms that add a new dimension to her vulnerability. Samuel Whitten takes on the role of the entitled well, swaggering and dancing to the tune of his own self-assurance. But he's also suave enough to display the cracks in his cocky exterior. Technically, *Red Carpet* has some clarity issues that need to be addressed. Although we determine that Laura is waiting in a car for Lou later in the script, this important detail needs and could have been established much earlier with some simple pantomiming. I spent a great deal of time wondering why Laura didn't just walk away that I should have spent on absorbing the play. Also, the date's turn from lighthearted and fun to sinister occurs much too swiftly, as does Laura's sudden turn from being shy to being brazen. Although these changes were as to be expected, they were simply implausible for the running time allotted. With some more development, *Red Carpet* could be a nice vehicle for taking the edge off of star gazing.

Rainbow Sprinkles

A mom with exaggerated concerns about being politically correct interviews a clown for her son's tenth birthday party in Stacey Lane's *Rainbow Sprinkles*. One can immediately tell from her no-nonsense appearance that Miranda (Christine Bokhour) will give Rainbow Sprinkles (Jacqueline Kroschell), her latest clown interviewee, a hard time. Bokhour delivers heartily to that end. Miranda wants everything that Rainbow Sprinkles, and clowns in general, are not. She interviews thoroughly, posing question after question about Rainbow's clown material, but the answers never measure up to her standard. Every joke, every act, every balloon animal, and even the clown makeup are poked with a political prod, and nothing survives.

Rainbow Sprinkles zeroes in on the regulation of fun at the expense of childhood reverie. Kroschell is a revelation as Rainbow Sprinkles, embodying the original gentle, warm, and benevolent spirit of a clown that children who are not tainted by cynicism love. At a time when updated versions of clowns are being profiled, *Rainbow Sprinkles* is timely and a reminder that sometimes things should stay in their original forms. There is no slapstick, no suspicions of child molestations, and no disgruntled behavior here. Although Rainbow's speech does get far too preachy in the end, the message is well received by the audience, if not by Miranda herself.

The 2007 EstroGenius Festival

Through October 13

Manhattan Theatre Source, 177 MacDougal Street between 5th and 6th Avenues, off of 8th Street

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