

The Female of the Species ridiculously funny, well-acted

East Side Players open season with Joanna Murray-Smith play

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East Side Players first show of the season, *The Female of the Species*, is a hilarious cautionary tale that says if you want to be famous, your life doesn't just belong to you anymore.

In the Canadian premiere of this farce-like comedy by Joanna Murray-Smith, author and feminist icon Margot Mason (Christina Reynolds) comes face-to-face with the reality that fame and influence carries responsibility after the adoration of a fan turns sour.

From the moment this show begins and we hear Margot talking on the phone with her longtime publisher Theo (Daryl Taylor) about her writer's block, it's obvious she's brash, egocentric and opinionated.

These traits fit perfectly for this author and one-time teacher whose book *The Cerebral Vagina* helped to establish her as the feminist author of her day.

But the fame-loving Margot gets the surprise of her life after an angry former admirer Molly (A.K. Shand) shows up at her home to kill her for the damage her books have done.

She blames Margot for ruining her life, starting with her mother who abandoned her and later committed suicide clutching a copy of *The Cerebral Vagina*. Wanting to know the lady who her mother admired so much, Molly took Margot's class only to be told she has no writing talent, leading her to drop out of university.

While it sounds like an immature blame-game of the "me" generation, this contempt equals Margot being gagged and handcuffed to her desk, waiting to be shot.

Hope arrives in the form of her daughter Tess (Amanda Smith) who unexpectedly shows up, but she's busy having a breakdown. She's left her kids alone and she, too, is there to blame her mother for her unhappiness, bonding with Molly over their mutual anger.

From here, the story gets progressively weirder as Tess' soft-spoken and clueless husband Bryan (Matt Austin) shows up to retrieve Tess, followed by Frank (Sean Killackey), Tess' taxi driver, who's angry at her disinterest in his problems during the drive there.

They all blame Margot for their pain, for poisoning women's minds with her gender bias that also made her a bad mom, Molly an angry woman, and for rendering men unnecessary. Mostly, they accuse her of being completely out of touch with those she aims to reach – people.

However, it seems Margot may know more than she's given credit for, and the debate between them all has more twists, turns and dead ends than a maze. Keep in mind, this is all happening while Molly, and everyone at some point, takes a turn with the gun as they have their meltdown moment, and Margot is handcuffed to her desk.

It's absurd and silly; the dialogue is witty, relatable at times, and extremely funny. The talented actors in this show give amazing performances and portray their roles convincingly.

Smith as Tess is a scene-stealer, on more than one occasion, as is Austin as the soft-spoken and feminine Bryan. They're a great comedic duo who delivers their lines flawlessly.

Reynolds as Margot is commanding, funny and her sarcastic delivery, even in the face of her possible death, is hilarious. She has some great scenes with both Shand, who plays the likeable home intruder looking with a vendetta, and Killackey as Frank the depressed taxi driver.

There were some pretty critical reviews of the U.S. debut of this show, but the show is not meant to be taken seriously, or be a tutorial on the state of feminism past and present. It's ridiculously funny and extremely well acted, so take it for what it is and enjoy!

The Female of the Species runs until Nov. 9 at 8 p.m., at The Papermill Theatre, 67 Pottery Rd. Tickets are \$22 and can be purchased by calling 416-425-0917 or online at www.eastsideplayers.ca (<http://www.eastsideplayers.ca>)