

Review

Good Egg

By Dorothy Fortenberry; Directed by Kel Haney

Off-Off-Broadway, Play

Runs through 11.7.10

LABA Theatre at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street

by Rachel Merrill Moss on 10.25.10



Andrea Day and Dan McCabe in The Red Fern Theatre Company's *Good Egg*. Photo by Eliza Brown.

BOTTOM LINE: A sister and her bipolar brother duke out the morals and merits of genetic testing prior to her in vitro fertilization.

What is natural about conception in today's diagnose-and-prescribe crazed society? And what does natural conception mean at this point when screening is done to predict and thus prevent all possible surprises? The Red Fern Theatre Company's world premiere production of Dorothy Fortenberry's *Good Egg* raises these questions and more.

The play focuses on thirty-something, personable and mothering Meg, who desperately wants a child, despite the fact that she is neither married nor in a relationship. That is, aside from the uneven relationship she has with her bipolar, dependant brother Matt. As *Good Egg* begins, Meg discusses her gynecological issues with the audience, exclaiming that she's been diagnosed with endometriosis and that if she's to have a baby, she must do it now. Switching into her fourth-walled reality, Meg then has the heady task of explaining the situation to Matt. Though he eventually agrees to support Meg's decision to use a sperm donor she's found online, Fortenberry compellingly makes Matt the voice of reason at this point, calling into question what Meg knows about this sperm donor and why she doesn't simply have a baby the "normal" way. But since she lacks both a partner and the time to find one, Meg has no choice and continues with the process.

And now the didactic part of the play unfolds. Matt, who has heretofore been well behaved, begins to mentally destabilize at the thought that Meg is going to have her harvested eggs tested for hereditary diseases, including bipolar disorder. Seeing this as a clear judgment about him and his worth, Matt is overwhelmed by the idea that Meg wishes he was anything but what he is. As the argument rages, and Matt becomes more and more manic, Meg can no longer cope with him, and the confrontation is soon brought to a head.

Though undoubtedly (and unknowingly) reiterating the necessity for Meg to screen for potential disease, Matt does articulate a number of well-constructed arguments. Specifically, Matt calls into question the incessant quest for perfection that procreation has lately become. Does checking for genetic disorders really fall under the category of simply wanting what's best for the future of our population? *Good Egg* thus effectively lays out the moral dilemmas involved in choosing whether or not to screen for hereditary disorders and diseases, as well as believably presenting a bipolar character who has a chance to describe the internal processes of the brain during high and low points.

Though the characters end up more as figureheads for their respective sides, the acting is effective and the science-driven arguments are refreshingly poignant. Sci-fi no longer, genetic screenings for the recently impregnated are now simply par for the prenatal course. The one strange element is how Matt repeatedly refers to Meg's harvested eggs as babies and she vehemently corrects him over and over again, explaining that they are just cells at this stage and absolutely nothing else. The necessity for this bit of pro-life/pro-choice mention is unclear and adds little to the argument on either side.

Kel Haney's direction is clean and clear, much like Scott Dougan's tidy set. Colin Wambsgans' musical composition is charming and interesting. Andrea Day and Dan McCabe as Meg and Matt do justice to the script and their representative ideologies, and the actors cannot be blamed when the back and forth debate becomes a bit tedious by the end. In Matt, McCabe simultaneously has the more difficult and more rewarding role. Particularly captivating is Matt's monologue about his disorder, to which McCabe brings impressive physicality and zeal.

Part of The Red Fern Theatre Company's mission is to evoke awareness of social issues through theatre. To this end, they pair productions with philanthropic organizations that aid related causes, and donate a percentage of the ticket proceeds to those organizations. *Good Egg* is paired with The Family Center for Bipolar Disorder - visit bpfamily.org for more information.

(*Good Egg* plays at LABA Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 East 14th Street between First and Second Avenues, through November 7, 2010. Performances are Monday at 8pm, Thursday at 8pm, Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 8pm and Sunday at 3pm. Tickets are \$25 and are available at theatermania.com or by calling 866.811.4111. For more information visit redferntheatre.org.)