Pygmalionâ??s â??Be Here Nowâ?•: The Art and Ethics of Presence

Description

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SALT LAKE CITY, UTâ??In *Be Here Now*, **Deborah Zoe Laufer** crafts a theatrical meditation on beauty, mortality, and the ethics of presence. **PYGmalion Theatre Company**â??s 2025 production, directed with care and clarity by **Jason Bowcutt**, leans into the tension between despair and wonder, offering an experience that is as visually stunning as it is emotionally rich. At the heart of the play lies a quietly radical proposition: what if the whole world is already artâ??and what if recognizing that fact is an ethical act?

Promotional photo for Pygmalion's Be Here Now: a man in a plaid shirt and a woman lean toward ea
Photo credit: Robert Holman

> *To live in the brokenness of the worldâ??and still call it beautifulâ??is an ethics of survival.*
> *~Rhetorical Review~*

The story centers on Bari, a former professor of nihilism whose life has contracted into gray disillusionment after losing her academic post and returning to her rural hometown. Played by **April Fossen** with wit and aching vulnerability, Bari begins to experience seizure-like episodes that shatter her bleak worldview, flooding her with moments of transcendent, inexplicable joy. These visionsâ??aesthetic, overwhelming, dangerousâ??threaten to dismantle her reliance on control, rationality, and detachment. Urgent, raw, and quietly radical, PYGmalionâ??s *Be Here Now* is a meditation on presence, beauty, and the ethics of noticing.

Contextualizing the Playwright and Premiere

Deborah Zoe Laufer is a widely produced American playwright known for her ability to blend humor with ethical, philosophical, and emotional inquiry. Her work often navigates the messy intersections of science, spirituality, mortality, and interpersonal relationships. Lauferâ??s background includes fellowships with the Dramatists Guild and the Lark Play Development Center, and her plays have been staged at many of the nationâ??s top regional theatres.

Be Here Now premiered in 2018 at **Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park**, directed by Michael Evan Haney. The play was quickly recognized for its sharp writing and emotional intelligence. Critics at the time praised Lauferâ??s deft balance of metaphysical questions and quirky, character-driven comedy, comparing her style to that of Sarah Ruhl or Annie Baker, with a distinct voice rooted in Jewish-American humor and existential irony.

Art as an Ethical Practice

The play emerges from a **post-2016 sociopolitical landscape**â??a time marked by widespread disillusionment, cultural fragmentation, and a growing mental health crisis. In *Be Here Now*, Laufer doesnâ??t offer easy hope, but instead suggests that meaning might be found in fleeting moments of connection, even amid deterioration and death. The seizure episodes Bari experiences raise questions not only about medical diagnosis but about the limits of rationalism and the possibility of mystical or embodied knowledge.

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> *â??The whole world is art. Most people just donâ??t notice*.â•
> *â?? Mike, Be Here Now*

Promotional photo for Be Here Now: a man sits on the ground holding an overturned green chair bes
Photo Credit: Robert Holman

This broader dramaturgical context amplifies the **kairotic** (timely) relevance of PYGmalion Theatre Companyâ??s 2025 production. In a country still grappling with the emotional fallout of pandemic-era disruption and ongoing sociopolitical tension, the playâ??s exploration of how one lives meaningfully within uncertainty feels even more urgent. The PYGmalion press release taps into this background with language about illness, autonomy, and the right to choose how one lives and diesâ??echoing not only personal crises but collective debates about healthcare, neurodivergence, and agency.

Lauferâ??s work has always been interested in radical empathy, and *Be Here Now* exemplifies this, inviting audiences to look not for transformation through epiphany, but through the slow, vulnerable work of *staying present*. In this way, the play fits perfectly within PYGmalionâ??s season and ethos, which consistently foregrounds feminist, humanist, and socially resonant storytelling.

What unfolds is not just a love story or a personal transformation arc, but an exploration of **aesthetic epistemology**: the idea that knowledge, healing, and even ethics can emerge through the senses, through embodiment, and through art.

BARI: *I donâ??t know whatâ??s going on. I donâ??t know. I really donâ??t.*

LUANNE*: Thatâ??s love! Thatâ??s definitely love. Is it love?*

BARI*: I passed out again. And then â?¦ I donâ??t know. When itâ??s happening, it all makes sense. Everything makes sense. Itâ??s not all random. Like the whole world is art. I donâ??t know.*

LUANNE*: Youâ??ve been touched by God!*

PATTY*. Sounds to me like she was touched by Mike. Have you been with him all this time?*

BARI*. Iâ??ve been writing.*

> Promotional photo for Be Here Now: two women stand together, one holding a small object in her ha
> Photo Credit: Robert Holman

Bariâ??s counterpart in this philosophical journey is Mike (**Matthew Sincell**), a crow-keeping junk sculptor who sees the world as inherently meaningful: â??*The whole world is art. Most people just donâ??t notice*,â?• he tells her. Itâ??s not a throwaway line; itâ??s the aesthetic thesis of the play. Mikeâ??s world is one where discarded things matter. His sculptures made from rusted tools and lost buttons speak to a worldview where nothing is wasted, and where grief itself can be shaped into beauty.

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This aesthetic ethos is also an ethical one. For Bari, the decision about whether to undergo a surgery that may save her life but strip her of these transcendent experiences becomes a question of values: is a longer life without joy more ethical than a brief one saturated with meaning? The play never answers this question. Instead, it allows the audience to live inside itâ??one moment, one gesture at a time.

> Cast and production staff list for Be Here Now by Deborah Zoe Laufer, from the Pygmalion program.

Performances and Direction

Bowcuttâ??s direction is admirably restrained, allowing these ethical and emotional stakes to unfold through performance rather than spectacle. The Black Box Theatre at the **Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center** becomes a site of intimate witnessing. Seizure episodes are rendered with minimal yet evocative lighting and sound design, emphasizing their interior, affective weight rather than externalizing them as medical trauma or mysticism.

Supporting performances by **Niki Rahimi** and **Brenda Hattingh Peatross** as Luanne and Patty bring necessary tonal contrast, deepening the emotional resonance of Bariâ??s journey. Rahimiâ??s Luanne radiates a kind of clear-eyed optimismâ??her sincerity is not naÃ¯ve, but courageous, offering moments of lightness and warmth that challenge Bariâ??s cynicism without directly confronting it. **Peatross**â??s Patty, by contrast, embodies pragmatic tough love. Her bluntness isnâ??t crueltyâ??itâ??s survival instinct, honed by lived experience. Together, the two characters form a kind of emotional scaffolding around Bari, modeling different forms of relational care.

Whatâ??s most powerful is that neither woman demands a specific outcome from Bari. They donâ??t try to fix her, even when they donâ??t fully understand or agree with her choices. They simply remainâ??with their fear, frustration, and love intact. This steadfast presence reflects one of the playâ??s most moving ethical gestures: that witnessing someoneâ??s pain without trying to resolve it

can be a profound act of care. Itâ??s a rare theatrical portrayal that honors not action, but presenceâ??as if simply staying is a kind of sacred resistance. In a world addicted to problem-solving, *Be Here Now* reminds us that sometimes the most radical thing we can offer each other is attentionâ??not correction.

> ***PATTY**: Life is a gift. And youâ??re pissing on it.*
>
> ***LUANNE**: Sheâ??s not pissing on it. She just wants to be happy.*â?¦
>
> ***PATTY**: Well, Iâ??m not going to stand around here and talk her into living. If you want to live, live. If you want to die, die. But Iâ??m telling youâ??if you can save yourself and you donâ??t do it, I donâ??t want anything more to do with you. Even if you live, youâ??re dead to me.*
>
> ***LUANNE**. You donâ??t mean that.*
>
> ***PATTY**: Itâ??s called tough love, Luanne. I stand by it.*
>
> ***LUANNE**. Well, I think youâ??re wonderful either way, Bari. Even when youâ??re kind of sad and mean and awful.*

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Indeed, the central ethical act in *Be Here Now* is not decision-making, but *attending*â??to joy, to pain, to the texture of the moment. The title itself is not just a mantra but a directive: be here, now, with what is. Laufer invites us to see aesthetics not as ornament but as a way of being. To recognize the world as art is to treat it with reverence. To live in the brokenness of the worldâ??and still call it beautifulâ??is an ethics of survival.

In a world that continues to struggle with physical and mental health, political precarity, and emotional fatigue, amidst a long list of other problems, *Be Here Now* doesnâ??t offer escape. It offers a possibility: that beauty might still exist in the overlooked, the broken, and the unresolved. And that recognizing itâ??like art itselfâ??is a practice worth pursuing.

April Fossenâ??s portrayal of Bari is a highlightâ??dry, sharp, and emotionally raw. Her transformation from skeptical misanthrope to open-hearted seeker is never sentimental, instead grounded in bodily vulnerability and intellectual resistance. **Matthew Sincell**â??s Mike, a tender oddball with a crow for a companion, delivers both pathos and wry humor, embodying a character whoâ??like the birds he reveresâ??is a messenger of unexpected wisdom.

> The Be Here Now set, a cluttered workshop with shelves of boxes and tools hanging from the ceiling
> Photo Credit: Rhetorical Review, Opening Night

The Craft Behind the Scenes

The creative team behind PYGmalion Theatre Companyâ??s *Be Here Now* delivers a production marked by aesthetic clarity and emotional depth. Directed by Jason Bowcutt, the staging reflects a deep understanding of character-driven storytelling, with an emphasis on authenticity over spectacle. Stage Manager and Lighting Operator **Jennie Pett** ensures the production runs smoothly, with lighting cues that subtly guide the audience through Bariâ??s disorienting inner world. **Allen Smith**â??s set design is

magical, bringing Mikeâ??s visionary junk-sculptor mind to life in every detail of the stage. **Madison Howell Wilkins**â??s costume design captures each characterâ??s emotional palette. Intimacy Director **Liz Whittaker** brings sensitivity and ethical precision to the productionâ??s most vulnerable scenes, particularly between Bari and Mike, while navigating the emotional trauma of a character with Mikeâ??s past. Together, the creative team crafts an experience that is both visually and thematically resonant, honoring the playâ??s central idea: that beauty often emerges from what we overlook.

Bowcuttâ??s direction keeps the show intimate and emotionally focused. He allows the playâ??s surreal momentsâ??particularly Bariâ??s seizure-induced visionsâ??to emerge through subtle lighting and sound design, rather than spectacle. The Black Box space at the Rose Wagner Center is used effectively, enhancing the productionâ??s themes of isolation, confinement, and interior transformation.

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A post shared by Pygmalion Theater Company (@pygmalionproductions)

Why It Matters in 2025

What makes *Be Here Now* land so powerfully in 2025 is not just its sharp dialogue or philosophical bent, but its deep relevance to our current cultural moment. The play grapples with mental health, chronic illness, personal autonomy, and the longing for connectionâ??all themes that resonate sharply after years of collective trauma and social fragmentation. Yet the play never feels heavy-handed. Instead, Lauferâ??s script invites the audience into Bariâ??s journey with warmth, wit, and honesty.

PYGmalionâ??s production is ultimately a call to presence. It doesnâ??t offer tidy conclusions, but it does suggest that meaning might be found not in certainty, but in vulnerability, risk, and human connection. In a theatrical season filled with big themes and bold experiments, *Be Here Now* stands out for its emotional clarity and heartfelt execution.

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In a political moment defined by cycles of overwork and exhaustion, *Be Here Now* emerges as a quiet, powerful invitation to embrace the fragile beauty of being present. Rather than offering neat resolutions, PYGmalionâ??s production encourages its audience to dwell in uncertaintyâ??with humor, vulnerability, and grace. Itâ??s a sharp, tender, and ultimately hopeful reflection on what it means to live meaningfully in a world that resists easy clarity.

Soundtrack Companion: *Be Here Now* on Spotify

Be Here Now: The Soundtrack You Didnâ??t Know Was in Rehearsal

Curated by Keolanani Kinghorn
Listen here

Apparently, Iâ??ve been rehearsing for this review without even realizing it. Somewhere between existential dread and euphoria, my subconscious hit â??shuffleâ?• on a playlist thatâ??like Lauferâ??s *Be Here Now*â??walks the line between yearning and surrender.

This Spotify mix is a mood board of presence: quiet indie ruminations, cinematic crescendos, and just enough cathartic chaos to mimic a Bari-style brain zap. From Radiohead melancholia to Sufjan Stevens grace notes, each track seems to ask the same thing the play does: *what if this moment, however cracked or fleeting, is the whole point?*

Venue: Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center â?? Black Box Theatre

Directions: here

Address: 138 W 300 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84101

Dates: May 2â??17, 2025

Showtimes:

- Thursdays & Fridays at 7:30 p.m.
- Saturdays at 4:00 p.m.
- Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Tickets: $22.50, Student/Senior $17.50

Box Office: Call (801) 355-ARTS (2787)

Run time: ~95 minutes no intermission.

Mature audiences only (18+). Infants not permitted. All patrons require a ticket regardless of age.

Online Tickets: www.saltlakecountyarts.org

Program

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Production Company: PYGmalion Theatre Company

Playwright: Deborah Zoe Laufer

Director: Jason Bowcutt

Cast:

- April Fossen as *Bari*
- Matthew Sincell as *Mike*
- Brenda Hattingh Peatross as *Patty*
- Niki Rahimi as *Luanne*

Photography: Robert Holman

CAST

Program bios for April Fossen and Brenda Hattingh Peatross, with headshots.

Program bios for Niki Rahimi and Matthew Sincell, with headshots.

Program page announcing Pygmalion's next show, Carnival of the Animals on August 24, and the 20

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