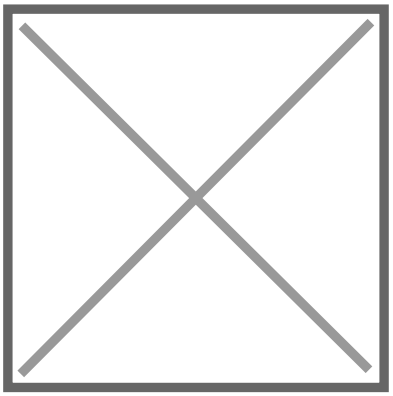


Sweetie Pies Only Theatre Co. Debuts â??The Aliensâ?• at Picnic Cafe

Description

default watermark

Salt Lake City, UT â?? Annie Bakerâ??s *The Aliens* is one of those rare plays that trusts silence as much as language, and trusts its audience even more. **Sweetie Pies Only Theatre Co.â??s** production, directed by **Ellie Otis,** honors that trust, mostly. It is a promising, often beautiful debut from a new company, staged with real imagination and performed with exceptional commitment, even if one element threatens to undermine the whole.

The Aliens premiered at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in New York City on April 22, 2010, directed by **Sam Gold**, and won the Obie Award for Best New American Play. The play was developed with assistance from the Orchard Project, whose name appears on the Sweetie Pies production materials as well, a quiet signal of continuity between this local staging and the playâ??s origins. The original Off-Broadway cast, **Erin Gann**, **Michael Chernus**, and a young **Dane DeHaan**, also wrote the songs that appear in the play, music and lyrics born from the rehearsal room rather than handed down from above. That the songs feel so native to the characters makes more sense knowing this.

The first and most inspired decision Otis makes is also the most obvious: they set the play where it belongs. Performed in the back patio of Salt Lake Cityâ??s **Picnic Cafe**, the production is site-specific in the most literal sense. Bakerâ??s script takes place behind a Vermont coffee shop, and here we actually are, behind a coffee shop. A real picnic table, a real recycling bin, a tree standing just so behind the bench as if it had been planted for the occasion. And because we are genuinely outside, the world keeps interrupting: a dog barks somewhere nearby, a car passes, someoneâ??s lawn mower drones in the distance. Far from being distractions, these intrusions are gifts. They make the play feel less like theater and more like life accidentally observed.

The story Baker gives us is deceptively slight. Two thirtysomething men, Jasper, a would-be novelist simmering with quiet rage, and KJ, a college dropout and amateur philosopher, spend their days occupying this back patio, talking about music, poetry, and the wreckage of their lives. When Evan, a seventeen-year-old barista, stumbles into their orbit, the men take it upon themselves to teach him everything they know. What follows is funny, melancholy, and quietly devastating.

Baker draws us in immediately. Within minutes of the opening scene, Jasper is dissecting his recent breakup with a woman named Andrea. She was crazy, he says, she played games, and the audience is already leaning in, hungry for more. This is Bakerâ??s gift: she drops us into the middle of an ongoing life rather than setting things up politely. We piece together who these people are the way we piece together who strangers are, through fragments and asides and the things left unsaid.

A casual outdoor scene showing two people on a bench, one seated and smoking, while another lay

The playâ??s humor is dry, physical, and genuinely surprising. In one early scene, KJ attempts to sneeze by staring directly into the sun while Jasper ignores him completely, and the audience is already laughing. Yoga poses punctuate the action. And then there is the moment when KJ concocts a mysterious mushroom tea from salvaged teabags and casually offers it to the unsuspecting Evan, who drinks it without question. The laughter this draws is immediate, and then slightly uncomfortable, because there is something quietly horrifying about watching a seventeen-year-old drink whatever a thirty-year-old stranger hands him without a second thought. Baker knows exactly what she is doing with that discomfort.

default watermark

Then there are the songs. Bakerâ??s characters burst periodically into original compositions, absurdist, stream-of-consciousness pieces that feel as though they have bubbled up from some uncharted region of the charactersâ?? inner lives. KJâ??s songs are delightfully strange, and in this production, they are among the eveningâ??s most joyful moments. The name of the play comes from one of the band names that KJ and Jasper have come up with for themselves, and music is obviously pivotal to the relationships in the play. But a few of the songs ask for guitar playing, and the actors cannot quite convince as guitar players: the performances fall below the standard set everywhere else. In a play where Baker asks so much of silence and sound, this is noticeable, though it does little to diminish the overall achievement.

PERFORMANCES

That world is anchored by three outstanding performances:

Jasper is a man simmering beneath the surface: a self-declared novelist, a high school dropout, a person whose mother died on his fifteenth birthday and who has never quite recovered. He is volatile, grandiose, and tender in equal measure. **Darrin Burnett** plays him with such ease and coolness that when the second act arrives, the shock of it is genuine.

Saey Kamtekar brings a lovely, aching awkwardness to Evan, the teenager who doesnâ??t yet know what he is walking into or what it will cost him. Evan is the audience surrogate in many ways, the one who stumbles into this world as we do, unsure of the rules, unsure of what to make of these two strange men who have decided to take him under their wing. Kamtekar captures that uncertainty beautifully, the way Evan hovers at the edge of every scene, not quite belonging but unable to stay away, drawn to something in Jasper and KJ that he cannot yet name. By the time the second act asks everything of him, we feel the weight of it.

But the standout performance of this production is **Laura Elise Chapman** as KJ. It is worth noting that KJ and Evan are written as men, and both roles are played here by women. That Kamtekar and Chapman inhabit these characters so completely that the question barely registers is itself a testament to the quality of the work. Chapman in particular is extraordinary. She commits to KJ with every molecule, leg hair grown out, beard shadow carefully applied, costuming down to the underwear visible above the waistband of her jeans. But physical transformation alone does not make a performance. What Chapman brings is something rarer: the full interior life of a man who is strange and brilliant and deeply unwell and somehow, despite everything, luminous. Her KJ is a performance Iâ??ll remember.

A young man in a plaid shirt and glasses sits on a bench, offering a cigarette to another young perso

At the heart of the play is an idea so quietly profound it takes a moment to land.

> â??I remember something Sandy Jano told me. She said it like three years ago. When I crashed on your couchâ?¦I was like talking to her about how I was always like getting kicked out of places and like sleeping on floors or whatever and she was like: this, uh, this in-between state, this being unstable or whatever, if you accept / it â?¦ the state of just having lost something is like the most enlightened state in the worldâ?•â??JASPER

default watermark

It is an idea Baker takes seriously. Jasper and KJ live permanently in that in-between space, neither succeeding nor quite failing, neither moving on nor going back. Society might see them as lost. Baker asks us to look again. The second act delivers a gut-punch, though not without some reservations. A pivotal development arrives with an abruptness that does not feel entirely earned, and for a play so committed to the slow accumulation of feeling, the sudden lurch can be disorienting. And yet what follows is undeniable. In one of the most extraordinary moments of the play, a character is reduced to repeating a single word, â??ladder,â?• over and over, building and building until it becomes a kind of primal scream of grief, and then stops. It is simple, and it is shattering. Both **Chapman** and **Kamtekarâ??s** handling of this scene is a testament to how fully this cast has inhabited Otis and Bakerâ??s vision.

A person wearing a colorful shirt and a red, white, and blue hat poses playfully outdoors, while anoth

A promising debut from Sweetie Pies Only Theatre Co., and a reminder of why *The Aliens* endures. Devastating and beautiful in equal measure, it captures a lost generation with uncanny precision: people who feel alienated by society despite being intelligent and creative, who mythologize parental figures, former hippies, and lost souls, and for whom drugs have become a crutch. The slow pacing is brimming with subtext in every moment. For artists and creatives especially, there is something here that will resonate. If you get the opportunity to see it live, take it.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

The Aliens is presented by Sweetie Pies Only Theatre Co. at Picnic Cafe, Salt Lake City, with additional performances at a residential location. Remaining performances are June 4, 5, and 6, with evening shows at 7:30 pm and a matinee on June 6 at 2:00 pm.

Tickets are $15 per person. To reserve a spot in advance, Venmo @SPOTHEATRECO with the date and time of your chosen performance as the label. Tickets are also available at the door. The company is actively accepting donations as well.

For more information, find them on Instagram at @spotheatreco.

About the Playwright

Annie Baker is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright best known for her naturalistic style and her interest in the rhythms of everyday speech, silence, and stillness. Her plays are set primarily in small-town New England and explore ordinary lives with extraordinary precision and compassion. In addition to *The Aliens*, her works include *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *The Flick*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2014, and *John*. Baker has been praised for having the subtlest way with exposition of anyone writing for the theater today. She made her feature film directorial debut with *Janet Planet* in 2023. *The Aliens* remains one of her most beloved early works.

Poster for the play 'The Aliens' featuring cast names and production details, with a blurred natural ba

default watermark

Image featuring two cast bios from a production. On the left, Laura Elise Chapman is smiling, descrit

Cast and Production Bios featuring Saey Kamtekar and Ellie Otis. Saey Kamtekar is highlighted for h

Category

1. Reviews
2. LGBTQ+

Tags

1. Aleisha Meier
2. American Theater
3. Darrin Burnett
4. Ellie Otis
5. Here are suggested tags for the review: Annie Baker
6. Independent Theater
7. Janet Planet
8. Keola Kinghorn
9. Keolanani Kinghorn
10. Laura Elise Chapman
11. Live theater
12. Lost Generation
13. Luke Jensen
14. Minimalist Theater
15. New Theater Company
16. Obie Award
17. Off-Broadway
18. Picnic Cafe

19. Pulitzer Prize
20. Rattlestick Playwrights Theater
21. Rhetorical Review
22. Saey Kamtekar
23. Salt Lake City theater
24. Silence
25. Site-Specific Theater
26. Sweetie Pies Only Theatre Co.
27. The Aliens
28. The Orchard Project
29. Theater Review
30. Theatre
31. Utah Theater

Date
2026/11/03
Date Created
2026/05/31
Author
keola06

default watermark