



Tragic Queens enhances  
Cabal Theatre's stature

## Description

# Two-part play explores the female condition in both impressionistic and expressionistic styles

By **Byron Toben**

The tiny but ambitious **Cabal Theatre** appeared on the local scene last year with a production of *Mary Stuart*, of which I, who sees most all, somehow missed. With its second show, **Tragic Queens**, it now seems established as a local repertory company.

The show consists of two parts. The first of 90 minutes, blending physical theatre, video, aspirations and sadness at the female condition in both impressionistic and expressionistic styles reminded me of Freud's late life quip "What Do Women Want?" See my discovery of the answer at the end of this article.

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Compressed into this first part are girls playing hopscotch, jiggling hysterically, clutching each other and falling constantly. A nude bathtub episode and a burning cigarette are other lasting images.

The program lists some twenty female authors as having influenced the play's development. I plead guilty to having heard of only four of them... Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Anne Carson and Susan Sontag.



Fine performances by **Jillian Harris**, **Megan Schroeder** and **Alex Petrachuk**, all I believe Concordia theatre grads, were beyond reproach. Director **Anthony Kennedy** and dramaturge **Kate Stockburger** seem to have accurately realized playwright **Rhiannon Collett's** vision.

As a fan of Architect Mies Van Der Rohe's maxim, "Less is more", I did feel that this first part was somewhat repetitious but could not identify obvious chunks to cull. This feeling was intensified when returning for the thirty-minute part two which featured another actor reciting a prepared academic lecture, interspersed by different guest actors each evening emoting powerful monologues, such as the aforesaid Mary Stuart and Clytemnestra from the *Odyssey* – cute touch and more in keeping with the title. To me, a device a bit reminiscent of Caryl Churchill's juxtaposition of time in her wonderful *Top Girls*.

Oh yeah, I promised to divulge what women really want.

Back in 1989, our own Marianne Ackerman, in her play *Blue Valentine* stated that it was ... "To dance". A few years later, I noticed a poll in the New York Times as to what they wanted most in a man, where dancing topped even humour, kindness, appearance, etc.

Around that time, at a lunch with a creative lady friend who claimed to be one of Leonard Cohen's special friends, I asked her what was his attraction to so many femmes as he was not a classic "pretty boy".



She answered, “He listens to you”.

So guys, if you want to gratify your gal, learn to dance and do listen to her attentively, not merely perfunctory.

I think.

This play adds a lot more food for thought.

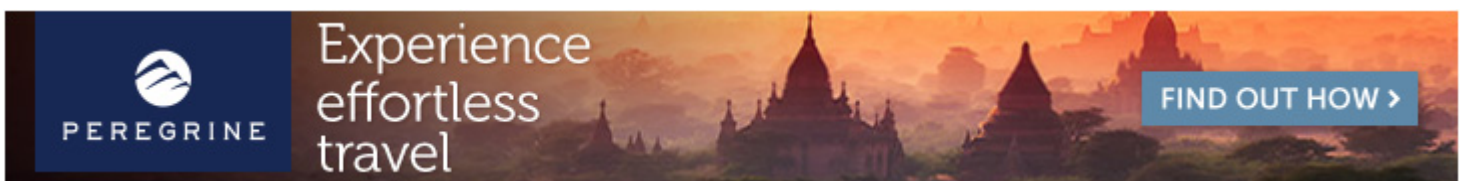
As Avril Lavigne famously sings, it’s all *Complicated*.

**Tragic Queens** closed at the Mainline Theatre on August 27.

*Images: Laurence Philomene*

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*Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.*



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