

***Snatch Adams and Tainty McCracken Present It's That Time of the Month***

By Becca Blackwell and Amanda Duarte

Directed by Jess Barbagallo

Soho Rep

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Reviewed by Bess Rowen

Right under the poster art for *It's That Time of the Month*, which features a dripping red smiley face against a dark pink background, Soho Rep's website includes a statement in large font that reads: "*Trigger Warning: There will be fluids!*" But this was the only preparation for what would transpire after I passed through the bright pink, fleshy folds that led me into the space for a unique meditation on menstruation. *It's That Time of the Month* is part talk show, part game show, part variety show, and part stand-up routine written and performed by Becca Blackwell and Amanda Duarte, and directed by Blackwell's frequent collaborator, Jess Barbagallo. The audience follows Blackwell's Snatch Adams, an out of work (clown) vagina whose journey to Soho Rep is covered in an animated video (designed by Derek Rippe) that precedes Snatch's entrance. After running from some scary laws targeting women and trans people, Snatch enters the theatre and is given the chance to make a wish. Snatch wishes for a talk show, which ends up being co-hosted by Duarte's Tainty McCracken, a fellow comedian with the gender politics and misogyny level of an average shock jock. These two foils create an environment where improv and crowd participation are essential parts of a journey through the trails and tribulations of menstruating people, a topic that is still too rarely discussed, especially in mixed company.

Before a word is ever spoken or a video played, Greg Corbino's production design set the stage for both the "taboo" topic and the forthright approach of Blackwell and Duarte. Audiences enter through the aforementioned pink, vaginal canal into a space featuring a golden vulva—

complete with clitoris—framed by an open pair of legs. Illuminated letters spell “It’s That Time of the Month” above the legs, while the area underneath each leg provides a seating area for each host. Tainty’s features a sign reading “Man Cave” while Snatch’s holds the video screen that also plays commercial breaks between each scene. Snatch and Tainty’s entrances reveal their visceral costumes, designed by Amanda Villalobos. Snatch is a six-foot-tall vagina that people can reach into—as the audience discovered when Blackwell asked audience members of different identities (e.g. gay man, lesbian, straight man) questions and then told them to take a treat out of their snatch. Tainty wears a furry coat with a puckered heart fascinator and a mantle of balls that Duarte often had to adjust throughout the performance. The layering of textures in both costumes during the performance was all the more impressive because of how much crowd interaction there was, meaning that the audience had the chance to see the details of these pieces up close.

The layering of textures in each costume was yet another instance of mirroring form and content, as the structure of *It’s That Time of the Month* was also a purposeful mix of genres. Blackwell and Duarte were joined by Becky Hermenze and Amando Houser, who comprise the “Slit Crew,” a nod to the “Pit Crew” from *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. Hermenze and Houser are equally important members of this team, as it takes all four performers to accomplish all that this show requires. From cleaning up the unfortunate yeast infection that causes Snatch to spit up some mealy liquid to helping prepare the space for the special guest (Pulitzer Prize-winner Michael R. Jackson for this performance), the Slit Crew helps keep the tone consistent across the ever-shifting scenes. The performances are the most crucial component of *It’s That Time of the Month* since Blackwell and Duarte are the thread that ties everything together.

Blackwell, a storied and respected downtown performer, has an easy-going stage presence that inspires trust. They are charming, but they are also incredibly intuitive, funny, and

quick-witted. These qualities allowed for moments of gravitas and pathos that one might not expect from someone dressed as a six-foot-tall vagina. Duarte's character is certainly more abrasive, as Tainty is meant to be a Me-Too'd comic, but she managed to use this persona to make fun of such people instead of simply recreating the type on stage. And her easy rapport with Blackwell made the two a truly dynamic duo.

Within the framework of the show, Tainty was there to serve as the ignorant one, which was easier to watch because Duarte is also someone who has an experience of menstruation. Of course, one important lesson I took away from this show is that having a period does not make you an expert on one. I learned a great deal myself! Aside from the knowledge gained, I was also struck by how comforting it was to see menstruation treated as a topic that can be painful and difficult. This was possible because of Blackwell's approach, particularly because of how their grounded, masculine energy encouraged participation from the cis men in the audience in ways that surprised and inspired me. Blackwell's final monologue touched on some of the nuances of being a trans person who has a period, and about the differences they have noticed in how people react to them now versus how they did before their transition.

*Snatch Adams and Tainty McCracken Present It's That Time of the Month* is a rare piece of theatre that focuses on a common bodily experience in a way that increases inclusivity and works against stereotypes and taboos through comedy. Having a trans performer lead a show about the monthly realities of periods across the gender spectrum proved an excellent model for how to push back against cisheteronormative expectations in discussions of health. And to do it in a way that included facts, prizes, puppets, and a splash zone only made it feel all the more relevant and fun. *It's That Time of the Month* does indeed include the fluids it promises in its cheeky trigger warning, but those are only meant to w(h)et your appetite for what comes next.

**Bess Rowen** (PhD) is an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Villanova University. She is also affiliate faculty for both Gender & Women's Studies and Irish Studies. She is a member of Actors' Equity and an intimacy choreographer. Her first book, *The Lines Between the Lines: How Stage Directions Affect Embodiment* (2021) focuses on affective stage directions. Her next book project looks at the theatrical archetype of the “mean teenage girl.” Other recent work can be found in *Milestones in Staging Contemporary Genders & Sexualities*, *Theatre Survey*, and *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, among other publications. She also serves as the LGBTQ+ Focus Group Representative at ATHE and as the Co-Editor of the *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*.