



Satisfaction? What cost?

Jessica Goldberg's latest play "Babe" is deeply unsatisfying...but that's part of its power.

Stick with me and I'll explain.

"Babe" is, in some ways, a #metoo play.

It begins in a job interview for an A&R gig at a big shot music label in New York. Gus is the legend in the room. He's made some serious records. He's discovered a bunch of stars from tiny hole in the wall dives.

Kaitlin is the young, entitled newbie who would love to work for someone like Gus. After all she's been into music her whole life and as an undergrad she put together free sound baths for the unhoused, so you know she cares.

Then there's the third person in the room, Abby.

Abby is silent most of the meeting except when she hops in to steer Gus away from

trouble. Even though he's been to all the trainings, it seems like Gus still needs someone to baby sit him so he doesn't trigger a lawsuit. It's clear though that Gus and Abby have been doing this a long time: partners, almost.

It's only at the very end of the meeting that we get a glimpse of Abby's importance. On the way out, Kaitlin says she had a picture of Abby and the 90's rock star Cat Wonder (think Liz Phair or PJ Harvey) on her wall growing up. It's clear Abby is the real deal. She's lived it.

Now if I give you that much of a setup - old guy with a lot of power, new, young, female employee who wants to break into the biz and tell you it's a #metoo play, I bet you can conjure up a plot line.

You'd be right but you'd also be deliciously wrong. "Babe" is more complicated than that. It isn't the story of Gus the harasser from another time or Kaitlin the young, entitled idealist who's going to call things out. Instead, it's Abby's play.

It's a play about the woman who broke into the industry a generation ago and had to put up with the old boy's network crap and insinuations that she slept her way to the top while not getting proper credit. She could never be who she truly is. It's a story of two generations of women who should be allies but instead find themselves as uncomfortable adversaries.

What's unsatisfying about the play has nothing to do with the writing or the production - which is solid top to bottom: wonderful cast, inspired minimal design, beautifully directed.

What's unsatisfying, ironically, about the play is that it doesn't fall into any of the easy traps. It's not a play where we can cathartically hate Gus or dismiss Kaitlin as naive and ungrateful. You can, but the play won't let you indulge in that too long.

The dissatisfaction is Abby's.

It's the dissatisfaction of a woman who's made it...but not with the rewards she would have gotten as man.

If you've got a daughter, or you're a daughter with a working mom, go see this play. If the notion of going back to catch one more show at CBGB's excites you, go see this play. Just go see this play.

"Babe" plays at the Echo Theatre Company in Atwater Village through October 24th.

This is Anthony Byrnes Opening the Curtain on LA Theater for KCRW.

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