

**ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT**

**BREASTLESS**  
**BY LAUREL TURK**



*A moving, witty, musical play about  
body image and sexuality after double mastectomy*

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# DIRECTOR'S INVITATION



**The *BREASTLESS* experience is an event!** Laurel and her cast of characters are a force and they are contagious. They spread honesty and open-heartedness like a plague. May we all catch it and continue to spread it!

**After its sold-out, critically acclaimed World Premiere** in western Massachusetts, we were chosen to perform in the Fall 2016 Midtown International Theatre Festival in New York City. **We won the 2016 MITF Festival Award for having the highest grossing Festival show!**

**We would like to bring the production to your organization.** The play runs 60 minutes, and we can offer a post-show discussion or related workshop tailored for your group.

**This show is cathartic, powerful and profound for those in the audience.** The audience reaction has been loud and clear: the aftermath of breast cancer treatments has not found a forum in either our culture or in theatre. Audiences expressed a strong desire that *BREASTLESS* continue performances: it explores the material and ignites the conversation.

**We have made it our mission to bring this show to as many people as possible.** We look forward to tailoring our offering to your organization.

Sincerely,

**Jeannine Haas**  
*BREASTLESS* Director  
Artistic Director of Pauline Productions  
[paulinelive@gmail.com](mailto:paulinelive@gmail.com)

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES



I wrote *BREASTLESS* primarily to help me integrate an overwhelming and challenging experience of losing my breasts.

I also turned to the memoirs and blogs of other women who had been through breast cancer for information and assistance.

There are many wonderful writings available, but it was difficult to find much about body image, about sexuality (let alone lesbian sexuality), or about the choice to forego reconstruction surgery.

And other than some writing from the late 1970's and 1980's, there are very few voices expressing outrage at the breast cancer epidemic that continues on.

I hope that telling this story gives other women permission to feel and share more layers of their own experiences. I hope that this piece challenges us to become less complacent about the prevalence of cancer, and to work collectively to create a less toxic, healthier world.

### **Laurel Turk**

Playwright

Performer

[laurelt@crocker.com](mailto:laurelt@crocker.com)

# PRODUCTION HISTORY

## **Midtown International Theatre Festival**

NYC - November 16, 18, 20, 2016

**WINNER - 2016 MITF Festival Award (highest grossing show)**

## **The Parlor Room**

Northampton, MA - November 9, 2016

## **Pauline Productions**

Ashfield, MA - January 14-24, 2016

**WORLD PREMIERE**

Directed by Jeannine Haas

## **Double Take Fringe Festival**

Greenfield, MA - October 16-17, 2015

Staged Reading

Directed by Melissa Redwin





## Bosom Buddies

“Spiced with songs and leavened with laughter.”

By Chris Rohmann - Jan 20, 2016

“You know the story,” says Laurel Turk at the beginning of her fearless new play *BREASTLESS*. “A woman is living her life, finds the lump, and suddenly she is riding a bullet train of doctor visits, treatments and fear. But the story I want to tell you is the story of the body.

“My body,” she says simply, “has no breasts.”

The story she tells is largely composed of things that aren’t usually included in the breast-cancer “story” – “flesh and scars and wounds ... curves and flatness ... sensation ... loss ... sex.”

Written by Turk and performed by her and a lively three-woman ensemble, *BREASTLESS* plays through this weekend in Ashfield’s First Congregational Church. (Last weekend’s performances were more than sold out, so the show has been moved into the spacious sanctuary with seating for all.)

You might expect Turk’s first-person narrative of her experience before and after a bilateral mastectomy (that is, both breasts entirely removed) to be even sadder and more depressing than other accounts, because it is so frank and unadorned. But quite the contrary. And “unadorned” is quite the wrong term. The 70-minute performance, adroitly staged by Jeannine Haas, is spiced with songs and leavened with laughter.

Not that the show makes light of the life-altering changes that every woman in this situation goes through. I almost said “every woman this happens to,” but no. The core of Turk’s story is that she didn’t let the prognosis and outcome “happen to her,” but made clear-eyed decisions and dealt with them thoughtfully, courageously and creatively.



## Bosom Buddies

By Chris Rohmann - Jan 20, 2016

The key decision she made was to forego breast reconstruction surgery, partly because of the rather gruesome procedures involved – apparently taking flesh and muscle from the abdomen and/or (I wasn't quite clear on this part) inserting silicon implants. She looks over an informational brochure that describes everything except what a reconstructed breast feels like to its wearer.

"You'd think they'd mention that," she remarks wryly, and the scene segues into a song, "Tits and Abs," a parody of the number from *A Chorus Line*, complete with spangly top hats. When Turk contemplates undergarment prostheses, there's a delicious but affectionate send-up of that well-known "Madame of Bogus Bosoms" and her popular Northampton brassiere emporium.

To this observer, writing and especially performing this piece represents an act of courage just as great as what it took to go through what the play enacts. She's brutally – and often humorously – honest when examining her own roller-coaster feelings about her relationship with her transformed body and with her lover. Onstage, all the women wear a basic outfit of tank top and pants, with costume overlays. Seeing Turk's unapologetically flat chest is just as moving as anything she says.

She's not an actor – nor, until now, a playwright, though you wouldn't know it. Her forthright style, ironic humor and smart, strong presence make an effective and affecting performance. She's more than ably abetted by Emily Bloch, Emily Fox and Dorian Gregory, who deftly take on a variety of characters while acting as a kind of supportive chorus.

The show is about breast cancer and its aftermath, but it's one that will resonate, as the publicity puts it, for "anyone with a body."

Arts

## Theater: Laurel Turk's play 'Breastless' takes on life after cancer

By DIANE BRONCACCIO Recorder Staff January 2016

“Tits — from abs! Buy yourself a fancy pair. We can use your derriere. ...”

“... We can build new nipples for you. So your spouse will still adore you.”

These lines are sung by a “chorus line” of women with canes and top hats, to the tune of a song from the musical *A Chorus Line*. The song is about one woman’s dilemma while considering reconstruction surgery, after undergoing a double mastectomy for breast cancer. And the song is one of the lighter moments from *BREASTLESS*, written by Laurel Turk. She is the star of the show and a breast cancer survivor whose performance piece chronicles the journey she and other breast cancer patients take while healing from the physical and emotional consequences of both the disease and their post-surgery bodies.

First performed as a staged reading this fall at the Double Take Fringe Festival in Greenfield, *BREASTLESS* will be presented for the first time as a play at the First Congregation Church in Ashfield from Jan. 14 through 24. Jeannine Haas is directing this show, which is being staged by Pauline Productions. Show times are Thursdays through Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. There are only eight performances, and tickets may already be sold out for some performances. Tickets are \$15 for Thursdays and \$20 for Friday through Sunday performances. At the door, all shows are an additional \$5, if tickets are still available.

In a review of the staged reading, Pam Kinsmith of the New England Center for Circus Arts wrote: “As high or higher than the bar set by *The Vagina Monologues*, Laurel Turk’s *BREASTLESS* was a stunning performance ... Flawless writing with humor, relentless truth and compassion ...”

A physician wrote that the performance “will definitely affect my work with folks who are dealing with cancer.”

“It’s 85 percent to 90 percent my story — but certainly informed by other stories I’ve heard,” says Turk, who lives in Sunderland.

## Theater: Laurel Turk's play 'Breastless' takes on life after cancer

“When I went to the plastic surgeon, she was lovely and didn’t pressure me (to have reconstructive surgery). But I’ve heard stories from other women,” she said.

Turk, a licensed acupuncturist and Chinese medicine herbalist, had a mastectomy in 2012, after cancer was found in both breasts.

“I started writing in Cancer Connection’s writing groups,” said Turk. “A lot of that material was the basis of what eventually became this performance piece.”

“It’s still evolving,” she added. “But when it got accepted for the Double Take Fringe Festival, I had to narrow it down. I’ve been writing consistently since the diagnosis.”

To limit the staged reading to 45 minutes, Turk decided to focus on post-surgery body image and sexuality. “I chose those themes because that was some of my best writing,” she said. “There’s a lot (elsewhere) that you can read about already. Even in support groups, it was hard to get people to talk about sexuality.”

“My process of adjusting to my new body is evolving,” said Turk, who is now flat-chested. “But this year, it’s much more in the background for me, in my daily life. It used to be an issue every time I got dressed in the morning.”

Turk has prosthetic breast forms, but wears them less as she becomes more comfortable with her body.

“I kind of compare it to coming out as a lesbian,” she says of her new shape. “I do know more lesbians who’ve chosen not to do reconstruction.”

Turk said she knows heterosexual women who think about how much they are willing to change their bodies to make men happy, when they consider whether to undergo reconstructive surgery and implants.

But her play makes clear that fears you are no longer desirable after breast cancer surgery can be present regardless of whether a woman is straight or lesbian.

“The grieving is pretty intense,” Turk says. “On some level, how much I had to struggle with my body image was a surprise.”



## Theater: Laurel Turk's play 'Breastless' takes on life after cancer

Turk stars in this production, starting with the visit to the doctor, when the breast cancer is first discovered, then moving on to the surgery, the removal of the bandages, the first time showing her scars to her partner.

“If you want to make love with me, start by rubbing my back,” the character in the play says to an unseen lover. “Let me feel your hands on parts of me that feel like me. ... Let me feel this much of normal.”

In another scene, a woman instructs others “How to say goodbye to your breasts.”

“Draw them,” she urges. “There’s some time left to see them, appreciate them, give them your time.”

“Take photos,” this character continues. “You will want these pictures even though it will take a long time before you want to look at them.”

This character also urges the women to have a “goodbye bath,” and to recall the first time they went bra-shopping.

“In my wildest dreams, flat is sexy,” Turk says, in one of the play’s lines.

This is Turk’s first play, written over a three-year period. When asked if she felt vulnerable performing such material on stage, Turk said she was more concerned about her ability as an actor.

“I don’t have a lot of acting experience,” she said, “but I felt very strongly (the actor) needed to be somebody with that body type.”

“It’s been really great for me to tell my story. By the time I got to perform it, I had written and edited and re-edited. And I had shared it in writing groups. The material is very vulnerable; I think what felt even more vulnerable is I’m not an experienced writer or actor.”

When asked how audiences accepted the reading at Double Take, Turk said she couldn’t have been more pleased with their responses. “I felt that people were very moved emotionally, even though I’m writing about my specific experience, it is connecting in all kinds of ways.”

# PHOTO GALLERY

## The Company



**Laurel Turk**  
Playwright  
Performer



**Dorian Gregory**  
Ukulele  
Ensemble



**Emily Fox**  
Choreography  
Ensemble



**Emily Bloch**  
Vocalist  
Ensemble



**Jeannine Haas**  
*BREASTLESS* Director  
Artistic Director of  
Pauline Productions

## Midtown International Theatre Festival

NYC - November 2016

Photos by Athena Stylos



# PHOTO GALLERY

## The Parlor Room

Northampton, MA - November 2016

Photos by Athena Stylos



# PHOTO GALLERY

## Pauline Productions

Ashfield, MA - January 2016

Photos by Jon Crispin



# PHOTO GALLERY

## Pauline Productions

Ashfield, MA - January 2016

Photos by Jon Crispin

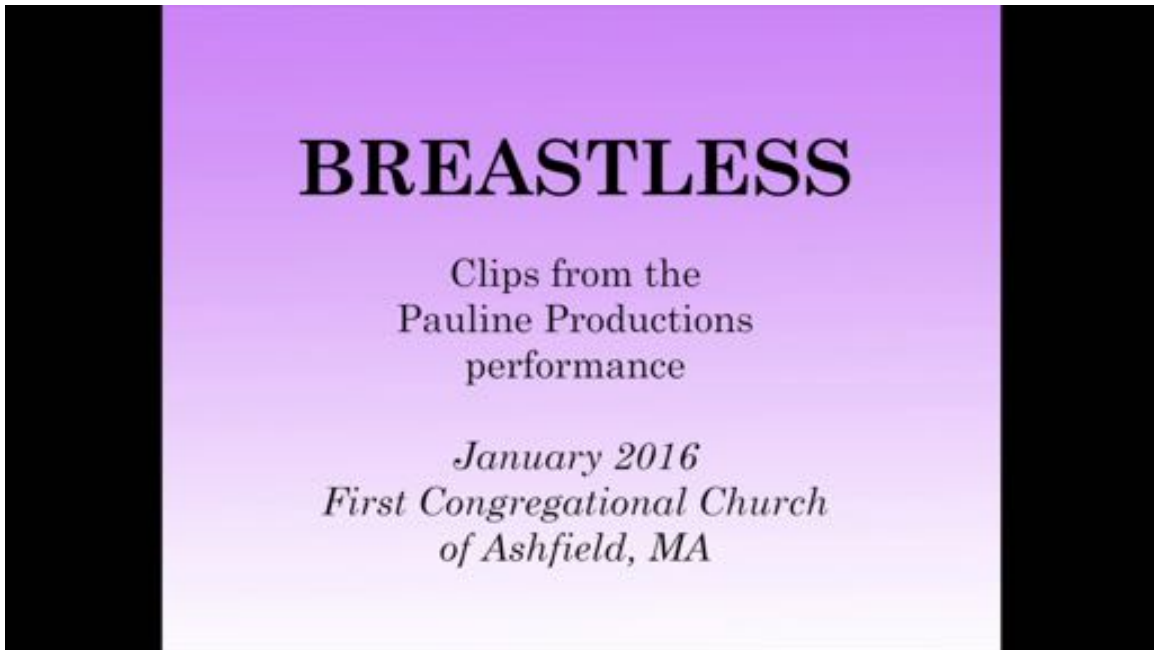


## PRESS LINKS

### VIDEO TRAILERS

**Clips from Pauline Productions Performance - January 2016**

VIEW ONLINE [HERE](#)



**MITF Minute Promotional Trailer - November 2016**

VIEW ONLINE [HERE](#)



# PRESS LINKS

## INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

### **Outer-Stage Review, NYC - November 2016**

"I was moved to tears and deeply touched to experience such a personal unabashed moment." **FULL REVIEW** [HERE](#)

### **Review Fix Promotional Interview by Patrick Hickey Jr., NYC - November 2016**

"I turned it into a theater piece because there were surprisingly few women writing or talking about these subjects. I found there was a lot of pressure in cancer culture to be positive, strong, or courageous. Many women weren't giving themselves permission to say and feel what was really true for them." **FULL INTERVIEW** [HERE](#)

### **WHMP Promotional Interview, Northampton, MA - November 2016**

LISTEN ONLINE [HERE](#)

