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Me PICK

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By Ronni Reich

There's not much promise in the premise of **Kirk Wood Bromley's** *Me*, which details the playwright's life in the womb. But through the filter of his demented, genius brain, a story that has a placenta as a protagonist becomes all at once a witty musical, a lesson in Chinese mythology, and a dense philosophical

journey.

Bromley pervades the Ohio Theater, which has been transformed to the Museum of Kirk, with photos, trophies, and docents in the form of actors whose nametags bear the playwright's name. The 12 actors each play *Me*, in addition to other characters, struggling to figure out which *Me* is real and which, in a fittingly self-conscious twist, is acting.

It all gets stranger when *Me* identifies as a fish — prompting cries of "genus envy" — and becomes intertwined with the myth of the Yangtze River dolphin, here named Baiji. Cameos from Mom-as-a-sponge Annie Scott and especially Bob Laine as Dad, a hick hammerhead shark in a gold diaper, are hilarious. Formidable acting also comes from **Brenda Withers**, playing Mujimo, mother of Baiji.

John Gideon's music eases the drama forward with playful vamps and intersperses scenes with ballads that walk the line between enveloping and soporific — a few numbers could stand to be cut. The cast is uniformly strong, with a nice sense of pacing and variety as they volley Bromley's hypothetical questions. Impressive physical characterizations by Withers, Drew Cortese as Xingba, and Sarah Malinda Engelke as Baiji also stand out, along with Paula Wilson's dancing and Marshall York's singing.

Alec Duffy's precise, artful directing, along with Karen Flood's imaginative costumes make the performance as stimulating visually as it is intellectually. But in the end it's Bromley's show. The banter, reflection, and fantasy in his text possess all the vitality and zaniness of 120 actors.

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