

Brandi Alexander ⁱ

31 July - 25 August 2019



Eloise Sarre

August 09 2019



Minnie Cunningham

August 09 2019



If a five-star review is required to mark a show as something 'you might only get one of' in your week here at the Fringe, then *Brandi Alexander* deserves it every bit. Odd to say of a comedy act when, towards the end, her question "is this stand-up?", struck me as one without an obvious answer. Some semblance of comedy, yes. When she talked about the pearls she stole when she gave up shopping for Lent, I laughed out loud. Tatiana Pavela (or her stage persona Brandi Alexander) was funny: not necessarily the funny you want to take your kids to, but funny all the same. However, when she trotted out her chicken-crossing-the-road one-liners that were actually a message of the horrible vulnerability of women, there was the start of a ringing silence that characterised the performance from then on. So very, very unfunny; yet there we were, sat in a comedy show.

Watching Alexander come out on stage to a six-person audience, I was struck by her confidence and unfaltering enthusiasm for her 'big comeback' after five years away. After my initial discomfort that so few of us had turned out for it, I was genuinely impressed - if a little baffled - by her tireless engagement with us. It was like we were some big crowd. She was completely committed to her performance, such that I doubt even a one-person audience would have fazed her. But as she embarked on the autobiographical tale of her own victimisation at the hands of a male colleague and close friend (the same person), it all began to make sense. And in case of any unsuspecting audience members, she finally broke character post-performance to hammer home the fundamental takeaway message: that this (*her*) story needs to be heard, known, watched. Whether to six people, one person or a whole roomful. People need to be speaking about her story.

I really cannot urge you to go and see her enough. Quite possibly that will mean looking beyond your own personal comedic tastes. It could mean looking past the first fifteen minutes where you may well feel both offended and subdued; where, were you to have a pen and notebook to hand, you would summarise it in one word as 'heavy'. When you had signed up to a comedy show. At points she didn't even say things I hadn't heard before - or at least not things that I know I hadn't heard before. But there was something truly powerful about it that for me made it unmissable. "Humour comes in all shapes and sizes", she said at the end. And for a comedy show to be characterised by an absolute lack of humour, it would seem that she was completely right. Clever, moving, and (occasionally) funny, it is definitely worth a trip to the Gilded Balloon Rose Theatre to watch, and quite possibly cry with, *Brandi Alexander*.

"Have you ever wanted to be pretty enough to be sexually harassed?", asks Brandi Alexander, shooting her hand up like an eager child. The character of stand-up comic Brandi (Tatiana Pavela) has returned with her comeback tour after a five-year hiatus, opening for a much more successful male comic every night. During her gig the audience learns more about her relationship with this male comedian, as Brandi grows increasingly distracted by the (imagined) audience's questions about her life.

Brandi, dressed in a sequined tiger print dress and high heels, is an overly flirtatious and crude character, who uses comedy as an attempt to make sense of the trauma of her experiences. Her experiences are prejudice and misogyny, which quickly reveal themselves to be verbal abuse and rape. Pavela is so truthful and assured that at times we forget whether Brandi is a character, or the real stand-up herself. This is in-yer-face theatre at its peak: shocking, emotive and sometimes almost unbearable.

It can be hard with a topic such as this to feel like one is adding anything new to the conversation. The dialogue around rape seems to be so prominent now, that it is almost a stereotype to center your one-woman show around it. At the start, some of Pavela's show feeds into this black hole of stereotypical feminist discourse which we hear so much about and occasionally feels as if it's simply a patchwork of other shows pieced together and thus the whole act feels about ten minutes too long. However, as it goes on, Pavela shows that she clearly has something to say, and in her own unique way. We come to truly care for Brandi and the narrative neatly flits between incandescent and hopelessness.

Her delivery methods are somewhat original, including a twenty-second growl of the word 'girth' followed by a kiss of the mic and a wink and, most memorably, an acapella song featuring solely the word 'rape' which progresses to a rocky, almost catchy, head banger. Whilst some of the comedy plays into feminist cliché, there are a few glimpses of bone-chilling brilliance, particularly when Pavela challenges the notion of comedy itself, almost screaming at us "Why aren't you laughing? Come on, that was a joke!"

Do not ignore the 18+ guideline- a few moments are incredibly hard to watch- one scene at the end had my fellow reviewer clutching my hand. The question you find yourself asking after the curtain is not "What did you think", but "Are you okay?"

Add a Comment

No Comments Yet!