

A LITTLE SHAME

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Tatiana Pavela. Photo: Louisville Fringe Festival

Brandi Alexander

Written and performed by Tatiana Pavela
Directed by Maggie Rogers

Review by Keith Waits

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In a recent social media exchange, a man related to me how he was not interested in watching Hannah Gadsby's acclaimed Netflix special because he didn't need to feel ashamed. I think he misses the point. The most important thing that art can do is force us to reexamine our biases and preconceptions.

Tatiana Pavela's *Brandi Alexander* is a difficult, challenging show because it does exactly that. A caustic and explicit berserker rage of a confessional from a woman who was sexually assaulted by a fellow comic, it begins as an edgy but very funny stand-up routine by self-described, middle-aged, "fat" comedian Brandi Alexander. It is pretty solid comedy for a while, highly entertaining even as it moves into darkness. Brandi is wearing a tight-fitting black and flashy metallic dress that is short enough to reveal the distressed portion of her black pantyhose high up on her thighs. It is a brilliant use of costume to foreshadow where the show is going.

Because Brandi is in the midst of a breakdown, an exorcism of pain and bitterness expressed in words and actions including graphic descriptions of rape and primal screams. Pavela wants to confront us with the harshest reality of how women are destroyed by sexual assault, an experience that never leaves you. She describes how men just "take", and how rapists are "colonizers", painting a fresh and revealing picture of not just the kind of man who is a rapist, but an indictment of the larger patriarchy that fails to stop sexual violence while passively condemning it.

The presentation deliberately blurs the line, so that we to a large degree lose sight of the distinction between actor and character. Intellectually we hold on to that knowledge as a kind of lifeline, but emotionally it is nearly meaningless. Pavela is funny, crass, heartbreaking and so raw in her performance that by the end, we are made to feel as if we have come into so personal and revealing a moment as to question whether we have any business being there.

Pavela and director Maggie Rogers give the audience no place to hide. The small space at Kaiju forces an intimacy that makes the experience uncomfortable, but how else should we feel when confronted with so brutal a truth? Hasn't complacency always been the enemy of reform? A little shame might do us all some good.

Brandi Alexander

Friday 7/20, 8pm at Monnik
Saturday 7/21, 7pm at Kaiju

Part of the 2018 Louisville Fringe Festival

Kaiju
1004 East Oak Street
Louisville, KY 40204
facebook.com/LouFringeFest/



Keith Waits is a native of Louisville who works at Louisville Visual Art during the days, where he is Managing Editor of their Artebella blog, and host of LVA's Artebella On The Radio on WXOX-FM 97.1/ ARTxFM.com. But spends most of his evenings indulging his taste for theatre, music and visual arts. His work has appeared in Pure Uncut Candy, TheatreLouisville, and Louisville Mojo. He is now Managing Editor for Arts-Louisville.com.

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