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EDFRINGE 2024 REVIEW: LENI'S LAST LAMENT

By Culture Fix (https://www.culturefix.co.uk/?author=1) / 13 August 2024



Performer Jodi Markel leads solo show **Leni's Last Lament** which delves into the playwright Gil Kofman's tale of Hitler's personal filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl's attempt to edit, reassemble, and sanitise her notorious past. This entertaining and complex piece delivers interesting musings on the challenges of separating the artist from their work and ultimately the timely importance of prioritising truth over political agenda.

Richard Calton directs this new cabaret which houses itself in the Assembly George Street's Drawing Room this Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The venue is turned in

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Leni's own personal editing studio where she addresses her relationship with Die Führer, being a woman in Hitler's inner circle, her blacklisting by Hollywood, and subsequently seeks to edit her controversial cinematic oeuvre in a quest for redemption and acclaim.

Riefenstahl's 1935 feature film *Triumph of the Will* and 1938 *Olympia* were partly-responsible for crafting the Nazi brand and helping establish the filmmaker's relationship with the dictator. Boundary breaking as a female filmmaker, Riefenstahl would live to 101, with the production of *Leni's Last Lament* showcasing a Leni who claims to have been unaware of the horrors of the Nazi regime – despite sixty-six of her Roma gypsy extras being sent to Auschwitz after shooting *Tiefland (Lowlands)* in 1940. Markel's Leni attempts to justify overlooking the horrors of the Nazi regime to justify her cinematic work.

Set in an editing suite, Leni attempts to discuss ways she could re-edit the film to make it more palatable to contemporary audiences, removing the blatant Nazi ideology, all while trying to avoid accountability for her role in partly crafting the culture of the time. The timely relevance to leading figures altering the truth, lying about facts, and pushing an extreme, alternative political agenda are mirrored in references to dictators throughout history and a former President who is currently seeking re-election in the US.

Leni's Last Lament brings in some audience interaction – as Leni desperately attempts to re-edit her film, whilst also showing how easy it was to become a cog in the society of an authoritarian regime. Markel's performance is an impressive one that layers complex reflection with biting humour, and Dietrich-inspired sing-song of German anthems like *Falling in Love Again*. Live musical accompaniment including the accordion creates a

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traditional atmosphere, transporting us to Leni's German homeland. This German vibe is created even as we enter the Drawing Room with a selection of German-language pop classics such as Falco's *Der Kommissar* playing.

Staging from director Richard Caliban is fresh and atmospheric. Leni is surrounded by film reels, which she manoeuvres, studies and drapes around herself, whilst she the character changes between chic period outfits. A projection screen at the back of the hall plays atmospheric video content including snippets of Leni's films. A puppet of Hitler designed by Lake Simons brings in a sinister comic element, whilst also emphasising how Leni lacks sincerity in her loose deflections about the horrors of the Nazi regime.

Gil Kofman has crafted a dark, complex and refreshingly amusing glimpse into the psyche of a truly complicated boundary-breaking figure, channelled in a stellar performance by Jodi Markel. Combined with sharp direction from Richard Caliban, *Leni's Last Lament* soars with a timely relevance regarding normalisation and acceptance of extreme and problematic figures in the mainstream.

Tickets to Leni's Last Lament are available here.

Photo: Francis Krow

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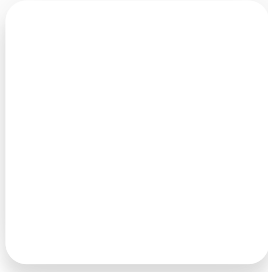
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