

Edinburgh Fringe 2017: Emotional Terrorism

Eliza Hunton doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at this weird and wonderful performance



Credit: Ellyn Daniels

★★★★☆

Opening the show moaning and gyrating on a chair with her legs spread wide, *Emotional Terrorism* packs a punch as soon as the show starts. A lot of shows at the Fringe talk about sex, but perhaps none more than Daniels. Only a deepened voice and a foreign accent introduce us to her former Romanian lover until Daniels jumps off the chair and becomes her former self on the floor. "I just inserted my tongue into this man's anus because he insisted on it," she tells us. "How did I get here?"

We don't ever really find out how Daniels got there, but the autobiographical tale takes us from her childhood in Orlando, modelling in Togo and Tokyo, to acting in LA. By the end of the hour, you feel as though you know Ellyn Daniels' life story as well as your own. Somewhere between stand up and a dramatic monologue is Ellyn Daniels' *Emotional Terrorism*. Sex ties the piece together, with Daniels declaring she lost her virginity to her Romanian ballet instructor and later confessing to contracting herpes from her first boyfriend. You are led to believe that the title of the piece alludes to how her sexual experiences have shaped her, and it could be easy for the audience to focus on only that, the image of a conventionally attractive young woman's sex life.

Emotional Terrorism, however, is about much more than that. Physical expression is more striking than the shocking story itself. Daniels moves around the stage with seemingly endless energy and grace, twirling as she recites her anecdotes before collapsing on herself as she recounts her worst moments. For an hour, the audience's eyes never left her. It seems almost inaccurate to call the piece a stand-up routine, when Daniels did so much more than simply stand on stage. It is this movement that gives her piece the emotion it promises in its title, where the life Daniels gives her words are what stop the story becoming just another tale about a girl who tried to make it in LA.

One of the most brutally personal shows at the Fringe, Daniels covers eating disorders, relationships, independence to name a few of life's struggles *Emotional Terrorism* highlights. Raw yet not alienating, Daniels told these stories with a sincerity which made what is often hidden by society uniquely accessible. Not everyone has experienced Bulimia, but everyone understood how Daniels felt. The stories weren't always sensitive, with Daniels declaring "Africa makes you realise we are meant to be free!" as she compares her time in Togo with her westernised life in Florida, and doesn't hesitate to put on accents for her Japanese employers and Romanian boyfriend which didn't seem necessary for the portrayal. However, Daniels avoids offensive jokes and these aspects are far from the focus. Becoming her past self on stage, she blurs the lines between acting and reality.

Emotional Terrorism isn't everybody's cup of tea, but it's a cup of something a lot of people need. To say the show makes you 'feel something' would be an understatement. From sympathy to rage to laughter, there are few emotions you don't feel within the hour. Ellyn Daniels' piece wholeheartedly defies both genre and expectations. Mimicking life, the end is abrupt, with Daniels seemingly in the middle of her story when the lights are turned on. Ellyn Daniels is not finished when the hour ends, and neither is *Emotional Terrorism*.