

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Review: Nikotine***



[Nikotine](#)

Venue 29, Paradise in the Vault

Nikolai Nikotine has few pleasures in life: his pet mouse, dreams and ambitions which have gone unfulfilled, and cigarettes. It was his wife's idea for Nikolai to deliver a lecture on the dangers of smoking. We do not meet Mrs. Nikotine, but we certainly feel her presence – whenever she is mentioned her husband begins to tremble like a sodden Fringe-goer emerging from a steamy venue into the chilly Edinburgh streets.

Based on Chekhov's *On the Harmful Effects of Smoking*, [Milena Milanova](#)'s adaptation utilises her own considerable skills as puppeteer along with the simply yet ingeniously constructed Nikolai. It is clear that Milanova is deeply invested in her production. She is every inch the vivacious hostess, and her physical performance demonstrates an impressive range from comic awkwardness to surprising grace. Nikolai's moods are beautifully nuanced, with a twitch of his eyes or a graceful hand gesture speaking volumes. The connection between Milanova and her puppet is immediately obvious and a pleasure to behold.

The production is not without its flaws. Some sequences seem a little overlong or add little to the narrative, and at times it feels we are barely skimming the surface of the story. The rambling nature of Nikolai's narration can be frustrating. Utilising the puppeteer as an actress also has its pitfalls,

as Milanova's enthusiasm occasionally pulls focus from her puppet.

As an emotive, expressive example of the art of puppetry, *Nikotine's* effects on your heart are likely to be entirely beneficial.