

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

REVIEW David Baddiel ****

☒ Reviewed for The Edinburgh Reporter by Lee Levitt

David Baddiel – Fame: Not the Musical

Assembly George Square Theatre, Edinburgh

“Fame is a mask that eats into the face”, proclaims an erudite tweet on the flyer for the first stand-up show in 16 years by the famous (though, as he admits, not quite as famous as he once was) comedian, novelist and television presenter. “Oi, shit beard. Shut it”, is tweeted underneath by Troll King @KingOfTrolls.

Coping with internet trolls and the peculiarly discreet British anti-Semitism that can involve newspapers using terms such as “north Londoner” to codify Jewishness are at the heart of Baddiel’s warm, wry and personable show that gives a serio-comic peep into the world of fame. The 49-year-old from Hampstead, wearing an unbuttoned check shirt over a black tee-shirt and jeans, casually introduces a throng of well-known showbiz figures, as well as members of his family, via anecdotes, videocam excerpts and photographs. Madonna, Ricky Gervais, David Walliams all get a look-in.

“Sorry to mention all these famous people,” says the former Cambridge Footlights member who became a household name through the BBC’s Mary Whitehouse Experience sketch show, and with his double-act partner Rob Newman became one of the first pair of comedians to sell out Wembley Arena, “but I have to”. The show, full of droll self-mockery, is part-analysis of fame, with the “conflicted” Baddiel demonstrating “an acute lack of empathy with the famous”, part-confessional, and part him trying to put the world to rights, particularly where it impinges upon Jewishness.

Having earlier shown a photo from 1973 of him and his two brothers in fancy dress at the North-West London Jewish day school, an Orthodox Jewish primary school in Kilburn, with him as “Miss World”, poked fun at his stereotypical Jewish looks – “I get mistaken for every other [famous] beardy Jew”, he says, donning a baseball cap and saying “Steven Spielberg” – and had a visual gag of his daughter, Dolly, with a panda hat brought

down over her eyes and painted to make her look like “a cute Hitler”, the comedy takes on a serious tinge.

He brings up a “Times” diary piece that mistakenly accused him, with the “north London” lingo reference, of being loud and offensive at a Peter Gabriel concert to make his point. In fact, the “offender” had been Ian Broudie, the singer-songwriter, who speaks in a Liverpudlian accent (being from Liverpool), and an apology was issued. Not for nothing, it seemed, were we in a lecture theatre.

Throughout, though, Baddiel, whose mother was a refugee from Nazi Germany, deploys disarming wit to show how fame creates a ludicrousness that follows those who have it – in his case, from the London Tube, to Aldi in Cornwall and to Auschwitz, where he recalls an encounter while on a Holocaust Educational Trust visit. Approached by a fellow visitor, and expecting a remark about the human condition, he instead was asked: “Dave, when’s ‘Fantasy Football’ coming back?”

“Fame is like a ghetto – but with less typhoid and more canapés,” Baddiel quips to his audience, before returning for a brief encore. “I’d better not stay on too long or I’ll be fined,” he says. Cue, another joke about Jewish stereotypes, before he disappears. Back into the “fame ghetto”.

David Baddiel will be performing *Fame: Not the Musical* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon on October 27; and at the Purcell Room, London SE1 from October 29 to November 1.