

Edinburgh Festival Fringe

REVIEW The Tin Ring *****

✖ The Tin Ring at Summerhall is a remarkable and refreshing live theatre experience, with none of the usual Edinburgh bangs and whistles. Performed by Jane Arnfield this meticulous, economical, accomplished and utterly convincing actor tells the story of Zdenka Fantlova, a holocaust survivor. Zdenka's life memoir, originally called My Lucky Star, has been adapted for the stage by Jane and the director Mike Alfreds.

In Summerhall's untheatrical, brightly lit lecture hall the story is simply told, and what a story. It eschews any emotional manipulation of the audience, deftly avoids the big picture, concentrating solely on the character of Zdenka, her singular personality and her methods of coping with and surviving this appalling crisis in her life. The story is riveting from start to finish, a brilliantly constructed testimony told from the heart and ringing with truth.

The structure is the key, telling the story first in terms of the facts, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the escalating persecution of the Jews, the deportation to the camps and murder of Zdenka's family, then Zdenka's own last -ditch survival thanks to her insistence on learning English as a young girl. (Beginning with the song ' You are My Lucky Star', -itself shot through with irony as the Jews are forced to wear the yellow star).

But then, from this 'naked life, wrapped in a white sheet' the play returns to the beginning and takes a different view, telling the story of the tin ring, a precious token of love, and here is revealed the courageous heart of Zdenka, her ability to fiercely love and be loved by her beaux Arno, 'all that we had is love' – her faith in herself and her family,

her utterly indomitable and calm strength. (This strength her beloved father's last gift as the Gestapo took him away).

The final loop of the story tells of Zdenka's immediate post-war experience, her recovery in a Swiss hospital, her attempt to come to terms with what has happened to her, and eventual brief return to Prague, never to set foot back there for fifty years – as Zdenka 'lays a new foundation, bit by bit, for our lives...'

What emerges is an inspiring single vision of survival, of the particular but universal methods of that miraculous escape, and of enduring indomitable love. I felt I had been taken on a remarkable, horrific and life affirming journey by this unpretentious, precise, heartfelt and unmissable performance.

Long may it stay in Jane Arnfield's repertoire, giving voice to all those whose holocaust testimony is silent, and teaching the younger generation not to forget

Five Stars

Submitted by [Ade Morris](#)