

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Review – The Next Big Thing



Helena spends her working day admiring the back of Steve's head. She spends her evenings trying to write a bestseller. Neither is going well. In *The Next Big Thing*, DK Productions' new musical at **theSpace on North Bridge**, Helena's mundane life starts to change – but what seem like improvements come at a cost, and Helena soon faces a moral dilemma.

Helena Fields has tried it all: romance, chick-lit, thriller, crime – 'even an anti-novel' but so far all she's had are rejections, and the same fate has just befallen her latest opus, *Miss Posy Does It In Trousers*. So much for feisty heroines. Helena's love life is even worse – Steve doesn't seem to know she exists. 'Who needs men?' she wails, unconvincingly, too scared to ask Steve out in case he turns her down.

Helena decides to have one more crack at breaking into the romance market, and turns to an online guide for help. In an attempt to create a 'strong woman' she dreams up **Libby**, a girl 'with the strength of ten men', but when that woman – for 'girl' seems slightly inappropriate for the apparition standing before us – appears from nowhere, Helena is understandably taken aback:

'I wasn't planning on my heroine being a

'Careful what you say next darling...'

For Libby isn't a Libby ('DON'T call me that!) , she's a **Liberty Belle** – a femme fatale with a mind of her own and a

back story as colourful as her wardrobe. Soon she's persuading Helena to jettison all her wet ideas about love and marriage. 'This isn't the novel I was going to write' laments our heroine (or is she 'ours'?) 'Oh forget it' says Liberty 'this is all about setting yourself free.'

In *You've got to go a little crazy to make your dreams come true*, a loud and lively song and dance session, Helena throw off her inhibitions and gets into the groove – she will!

she'll write that book, get that deal, and even get her man – what is there to be afraid of? As Liberty points out, Helena's previous creations are 'eunuchs trapped by your insistence on following someone else's formula – that's where I'm different, I've got balls!' In no time at all, Liberty has set Helena up on a date with Steve and shown her that her fictional characters will only come alive if she makes them; copying other people's ideas will never work.

So they all live happily ever after....well no, in fact, they don't. As fiction and fact continue to blur, Helena's image of Steve crumbles when he turns up with another woman, plus a male friend whose drunken vomit ends up all over Helena's face. Helena wishes she'd never met Steve – can she erase him from her memory and even her life by a swift bit of rewriting? In this increasingly weird world it seems that she could – but should she? NO! says Liberty – your life would be the poorer if you did; experience may be bitter-sweet, but it makes you who you are.

It's at this point that things start to turn nasty.....Liberty has her own ways of sorting out problems with life's plot:

'Revenge is like meat

Revenge is like wine

Revenge is so bad it tastes divine....'

Without revealing the rest of the story (or is it a story?)

suffice to say that Helena's creation starts to become a tad too fiesty. Should she follow Liberty's advice? Just who is making the choices in Helena's fiction – and in her life? Do they need each other, or can Helena stand on her own two feet? To find out and to experience the nail-biting climax of this thought-provoking show you'll need to go and see it.

David Kent's script combines smart one-liners and exuberant lyrics with a multi-layered story; on the surface it's a straightforward comic fantasy, but look a little further and it's a tale that raises questions of morality, identity, control and choice. **Rebecca Ridout** as Helena does a great job in conveying the emotional ups and downs of a writer's life, but the star of the show is undoubtedly **Dereck Walker**, who not only brings humour, pathos, villainy and dignity to the role of Liberty but also has a fabulous voice to belt out those songs.

The Next Big Thing is at theSpace on North Bridge (Venue 36) at 20.10 every night until 23rd August 2014 *except* 10th and 17th August..

