

# Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015 REVIEW – Cautionary Tales for Daughters \*\*\*\*\*



‘I am an ordinary Mum,


To bouts of paranoia I regularly succumb’

Well, don’t we all? In fact, never mind bouts....for most mothers perma-panic comes with the territory. Binge drinking, eating disorders, overdrafts and inappropriate relationships..... and while we’re doing all that, goodness only knows what our daughters are getting up to.

**Tanya Holt**, composer, performer and mother herself, is already up there with the worriers – and her daughter Dottie is only 9. What, she asks, should we tell our female offspring? – or indeed, what do we wish someone had told our younger selves? In ***Cautionary Tales for Daughters***, Tanya sings her way through a catalogue of advice:

‘I want her to be wary of how things can go wrong,

Say some nasty things within the comfort of a song’

And with a few well chosen props, a video and the very able  assistance of musical director and keyboard and oboe player **Suzie Shrubbs**, she does just that. Some of the numbers are very funny; the ***Tattoo Song*** is an hilarious reflection on the pitfalls of ending up with ‘rice fried with chicken heads’ engraved on your nether regions – ‘Don’t regret tomorrow what you ink today’, whilst ***The Story of A Labelled Girl*** is a highly entertaining tale of fashion victim Chanelle, who meets a sorry fate when she turns shoplifter to feed her consumer-itus. Even these songs, however, have an underlying blackness

– the pressure to conform, whether by piercings or price tags, starts early these days; primary school girls are already worrying about make-up and designer clothes.

**The Cowboy Song** – illustrated by a sharp animation – addresses the ways in which little girls are encouraged to conform – or discouraged from being different; Mary wants to be a cowboy, but in the playground the boys won't let her join in unless she takes the part of the saloon dancer – or the horse.

while at home her mother tells her 'You should try being a princess'. The song's chorus requesting a cowboy cake puts Mary firmly in her place. Try as we might to avoid the conditioning of our daughters, it only takes a look at a few TV adverts to see what girls are still up against.

✖ I have read that when children are asked what they want to be when they grow up, the response is now far less likely to be 'a fireman/train driver/doctor/astronaut' – no, what today's children think they want is fame – they want to be a celebrity. In **A Worthie Man of Fayre Garish Towne**, Tanya and Suzie tell of a man who needs to get his three daughters off his financial back. One becomes a seamstress, one a baker, and the third seeks her fortune in the world of showbusiness, ending up in a 14th century version of the **Big Brother** house, 'partially fameless and utterly shameless', 'from B List to Z'. She makes a mint, spends it all on drugs and drink, and ends up wanting only to hide from the world – but her Dad won't let her because – guess what? – he's reaping the rewards of her 'career'. Sound familiar?

And which woman of my generation doesn't have an issue with food? Growing up as we did, with a constant barrage of diets (thank you, **Jackie**), all of which seemed to involve cottage cheese and a scraping of some spread that no-one could possibly believe bore even a remote relationship to butter, is

it any wonder we have long lost any sense of control – or enjoyment – over our intake? Try as we might not to pass our hang-ups on to our daughters, they are under even more pressure than we were. In a song with very little to laugh about, Tanya's **Cherry The Amazing Yo Yo Girl** swings from skinny to supersize and back with monotonous regularity;

'Don't let your mouth convince your brain


To binge and starve and binge again'

Two issues that no-one should find funny are sexual harassment and domestic violence, and **Cautionary Tales** treats both with the seriousness they deserve. In **It's All Your Fault**, Tanya addresses the ways in which women are made to feel guilty, they 'can't take a joke', they 'have it coming'.

Perhaps the saddest song in the show is **Red Flag Flying**, based, says Tanya, on this question, asked by a friend of hers: 'How many times is it OK for a man to hit you before you need to leave?' Drawing parallels between swimming in dangerous seas and staying with a dangerous partner, **Red Flag Flying** is a beautifully sung with a haunting warning.

Procrastination...well, we're all going to act on our plans sometime, aren't we? It's just not a good time right now, OK? **Hugh Laurie** apparently said 'It's a terrible thing to wait until you're ready. No one is ever ready to do anything' and the show ends on an optimistic note with a song that sends our daughters a powerful message – get on with it;

'Tomorrow was made for you'

Tanya and Suzie are talented, warm and engaging performers  and **Cautionary Tales** is a slick, well presented production; it makes you laugh but it also makes you think. At the very least it'll make you think twice about dodgy tattoos. Do go.

***Cautionary Tales for Daughters*** is at **theSpace on the Mile (venue 39)** at 10am every day until 15th August; it then moves to **theSpace@Surgeons' Hall**, where it will be on at 10.15am every day until 29th August 2015. For tickets see the Fringe website [here](#). Please note that the show is suitable for over 16s only.