

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2016 REVIEW : History History History



History History History is a show about the complicated and knotty narratives of history, told through a loose “translation” of a 1956 Hungarian Football Comedy. [Deborah Pearson](#) is a writer, performer and producer.

In [History History History](#), she has produced a wonderful performance piece that made me laugh, cry and learn about the societal and political history of 1950s Hungary, leading up to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and some of its effects.

Pearson has created a piece that makes the history come alive while admitting that any discussion of what happens is a case of ‘this happened and then that happened, which lead to this happening.’ As she admits, she’ll never make a history teacher but she was certainly entertaining as she explained both what happened to the country and her maternal grandparents, who lived in Budapest at the time.

The show makes sure that you understand that life is sequential and linear but, much like Benjamin Sisko, sometimes we continue to live in a moment and even find it hard to move on from it.

The show is based on a Hungarian screwball comedy and political satire based around football that involves Ferenc Puskás. I know, that doesn’t sound like a good foundation to build a piece of multi-media performance art* but it works.

Pearson goes through the who, the why and the how of the political situation but also her own family history, which is

connected to the film. She even manages to include comparing the Galloping Major with the ice-hockey player and her countryman Wayne Gretzky.

Supposedly, referencing either of these sportsmen is obscure but obviously I'm odder than others as I know exactly who both are.

While exploring her own history, Pearson is open and honest, but at the same time she shows respect and compassion for her family. Some things, after all, are best kept in house. Her relationship with her maternal grandparents and especially her grandfather touched and moved me.

In part, that is down to what had happened to them since 1956 but also how they affected and influenced Pearson herself and how she sees them. One section in particular made me think about my relationship and knowledge of my four grandparents, especially my paternal ones, who died before I was five.

At one point she describes meeting her grandfather in 1986 and the cuddly toy he gave her. The honesty and love in her words moved me to tears and made me think of my father and his relationship with my children.

Throughout the show I realised how little I know of Hungary but that I wanted to learn more about the country. Hearing how, on the afternoon of 23 October 1956, approximately 20,000 protesters convened in Budapest to demand independence from all foreign powers and a free democratic socialist political system pulled me up. Up until that point the film and Pearson's narration is amusing and fun, but the light-heartedness of the opening moves on to sympathy and anger for a people trodden on by the USSR and abandoned by the UK and the US.

Suez was more important to them than people they had traded to Stalin. During the protest, someone in the crowd cut out the

Communist coat of arms from the Hungarian flag, leaving a distinctive hole. Others quickly followed suit and it is a striking image.

As is the chant that the crowd repeated, taken from a censored patriotic poem, the National Song; "This we swear, this we swear, that we will no longer be slaves."

Those are powerful words and to imagine a sizeable portion of the city's population chanting it in Bem József Square is both jarring and suitably dramatic. They are also good words to live by and I'm very glad Deborah Pearson taught me them. She also made me fall in love with [the Corvin Cinema](#) and ensured that I visit Budapest soon.

Sadly, this was the [only performance of History History History](#) this August but I hope Pearson returns to Edinburgh with as I would gladly see it again and would make sure others did.

However, you can see the fruits from one of her other endeavours, [Forest Fringe](#), until the end of Saturday 20th August.

*Apologies if that's not how Deborah Pearson would describe it but I can't think of a better catch all for the show.