

Five Edinburgh Festival Fringe Questions with... Charlotte Josephine



BLUSH – the new play from Charlotte Josephine

The team behind 2012's award-winning *Bitch Boxer* – Snuff Box Theatre and writer Charlotte Josephine – returns to the Fringe this year with *BLUSH*, a full-on set of stories about personal interaction and alienation in the connected world. Camilla took some time to talk to *The Edinburgh Reporter* – in applicably salty language.

1. *BLUSH tells five candid stories about revenge porn. How did you come to the choice to present the piece as five stories, rather than one story?*

BLUSH uses revenge porn as a catalyst but really it's a play about shame. Dr Brene Brown's work demonstrates that shame is a universal emotion, but it's messages are organised by gender. *BLUSH* looks at the unwritten rules of how to be a good woman/man, and then how the shame we feel at not measuring up can spill out sideways into acts of violence. It's a play about humans, about our fantastic capacity for both beauty and brutality. So in the attempt to give people an opportunity to see things from a different point of view it made sense to me to have more than one voice in there.

2. *It seems like there are revenge porn stories in the news every day at the moment. Was there a particular moment that made you think that this was something you wanted to address in a play?*

The play had been brewing for a while. I was working on a film about domestic violence with Ellie Browning and Only Connect.

Through that I met Lily Einhorn and was blown away by her work on gender balance with the charity Tender. Then I was doing a workshop with Sphinx Theatre; they'd set the provocation to write a female protagonist for their Women Centre Stage Festival at the National Theatre.

I think I first read about revenge porn in the paper on the tube home. I'd been researching shame for a while, reading Brene Brown and Elizabeth Gilbert and Jon Ronson, Revenge porn is a modern version of an age-old problem of gender imbalance. It's all over the news for good reason – we desperately need change. Professor Clare McGlynn is doing some fantastic work, particularly to change the terminology. 'Revenge Pornography' is so problematic, 'Image Based Sexual Abuse' feels much more appropriate.

3. *Last year's revenge pornography law did not treat the offence as a sexual crime, and therefore anonymity is not automatically granted to victims. The Home Office recently rejected a call for a change. Is this a story you've been following?*

Yeah it's f***ed isn't it?! Sorry for my language but I'm rapidly losing patience with a legal system that seems dangerously slow at changing laws which might protect women. I'm not an expert, but even I can see there are a few too many loop holes in the current law, it's not effective enough. I feel very f***ing frustrated at politicians in general at the moment, as I'm sure half the country do. I feel powerless, and very angry about that. So I'm personally trying to make some small changes in my own life, learning about my own shame, and finding new ways to be loving and kind to myself and others. Shame is a killer, empathy is the antidote, we have to learn to talk about our mental health.

4. *BLUSH is described as a slap in the face and a call to arms. Did you feel that you had to make any compromises to present the show to an early evening Fringe audience?*

No I chose the 6pm slot. What do you mean, because of explicit language? Erm, I dunno, maybe I should have thought about that a bit more, the 6pm slot felt right for it. I don't think you can do a show about shame and make compromises to soften the blow. It's ugly, but it's also tender. It's about kindness, it's aggressive in its message to be kind, like "be kind you c**ts!"

5. *In what ways do you feel BLUSH is a continuation and a departure from your previous work, Bitch Boxer?*

It's a very different show, so comparison won't be that useful, but it's obviously inevitable, especially as we're performing on the same stage. I've grown a lot since I last performed at the fringe. *Bitch Boxer* was a personal exploration of what it means for me to be a woman, and the strength it takes to be vulnerable, and this play continues that exploration but spreads out to five voices.

BLUSH is a continuation from our show *WEALD*, which was on at the Finborough Theatre earlier this year. Dan's writing in *WEALD* is a gorgeous compliment to *BLUSH*, they're both bubbling around the same questions. *BLUSH* is aware of its audience, and uses direct address again so that'll feel similar, and it's a sweaty one. More sexy sports bras ... joy!

BLUSH, Underbelly, Cowgate (Venue 61), 7-15 and 17-28 Aug | 18:00-19:00 £10/£9 (Concs)