

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017 – Mara Menzies: The Illusion of Truth*****



‘So you are here for the truth – but what is that?’

In today’s world of ‘false truths’ it’s hard to know what we can believe. How can we make sensible decisions when none of us really knows what’s going on? Everyone has an opinion, everyone thinks that opinion is fact; people from all sides of an argument seem to be increasingly unable, and unwilling, to consider anyone else’s point of view. And as we have seen, the consequences of decisions based on misinformation can be disastrous.

In *The Illusion of Truth* at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, **Mara Menzies** takes us into the world of **Yoruban** mythology to tell a tale of a man who wants more, and is prepared to do anything to get it. His story may be rooted in the Nigerian spiritual tradition of *Ifa*, but it has much to say about life in 21st century Britain.

The Orishas, Yemaja, Oya, Oshun, Elegba and Ochosi, are gods who represent humanity in all its forms, and who frequently turn up in the ‘real’ world. When our ‘hero’ Oshosi, already a successful hunter and all-round alpha male, decides his only wish in life is to join them, he sets out to impress Elegba so that this ‘god of the fork in the road’, the god of luck, but also of accidents, will take him to supreme god Oludumare’s party.

Find a perfect gift for Elegba to present to the top man? No

problem – or so Oshosi thinks. But his decision to pursue that special present, come what may, leads him down a path that will end in tragedy.

The Illusion of Truth is an hour of fast-paced, mesmerising performance storytelling. The lives of the gods are skilfully woven into the human story, a story powerfully delivered by Menzies, who keeps up the narrative pace while taking on the persona of one character after another. Her beautiful dancing encapsulates each deity's qualities, from wild, possessed whirling as Oya, god of the wind and storm, to the sinuous approach of the river goddess Oshun, queen of luxury, pleasure, sexuality and fertility, who 'snakes her way towards him.'

And it's not all serious – we are treated to the hilarious arrival of Oshosi's mother, who, in typical maternal mode, is horrified about the state of his house and the paucity of his food store – 'How is he ever going to find a wife?', 'Would you do that to your mother?'

Menzies uses few props, but they are impressive; red wings, a yellow skirt, and a wonderful bejewelled turban. Her braided hair – which at one point appears to change colour – flies about her as she moves. The music – from African chants to an operatic aria – complements each turn of events perfectly.

The Illusion of Truth is both a thought-provoking piece and an electrifying introduction to Ifa and its gods; Menzies (who also wrote the script) and her director/producer **Flavia D'Avila** are to be congratulated on a magnificent show. And it wasn't only the adults in the audience who were transfixed; a small baby opposite me sat happily on his mother's knee, eyes wide in wonder. ('He's a festival baby' remarked his justifiably proud parent.)

This first show was almost sold out – don't miss it. There's even popcorn.

Mara Menzies is an Edinburgh based Kenya/Scottish storyteller who has both performed and led workshops around the world.

The Illusion of Truth is on at the **Scottish Storytelling Centre**, 43-45 High Street (Venue 30) August 3-7, 13-17 and 21-24. Tickets £9/£7 from the [Fringe Box Office](#) or the [Scottish Storytelling Centre](#). 

