

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 – REVIEW – Baby Face****

‘Being told I have the fragile arms of a ten year old – I’d take that as a compliment.’

Women always want to look younger than they are, don’t they? Adverts, social media – everything is sold to us on the basis that it will help us shed years, pounds, or preferably both. But why is a youthful appearance a desirable thing? And why does a particular version of female youth form the basis of so much pornography?



Katy Dye in Baby Face

In ***Baby Face***, award-winning performance artist **Katy Dye** points up some of the less obvious ways in which women are encouraged to appear childlike – but also *not* childlike, for the image that forms the basis of so much online pornography is not that of a real child with a child’s behaviour, but one of a child-woman, one who looks one way but acts in quite another.

This is a one-woman show, the only props being a highchair, some clothes and a few baby accessories. With phenomenal energy, Dye moves seamlessly from grown woman to provocative teenager to dependent baby and back again in the space of a few minutes. Is there any similarity at all between the

fantasy version of a pink mini-skirted, finger-sucking, cheerleader and a tetchy teenager complaining about homework, exams, parents and (non) boyfriends? Why does that teenager think she should create a different version of herself? Where does this pressure come from?

Dye's impressive vocal range can accommodate a howling baby, a screaming banshee, and a woman talking baby talk, and she does this while using her body to convey an ever-increasing level of hysteria. From sexual adult to confused, desperate teenager and vulnerable, needy child, she shows us how language contributes to the infantilisation of women. Beauty products tell us we need help – they will make us 'super smooth', hairless, spotless, wrinkle/blotch/blackhead free. We need to be a manufactured version of 'perfect.' We are required to be both artificially young and overtly sexualised.

This is a powerful show that examines the way in which language can affect not only how women are viewed, but how they view themselves – which in turn may lead to them fulfilling the role created for them by social pressures, and suffering the consequences of not fulfilling themselves. It would be interesting to see this theme further developed to look at why men find child-women so exciting. Do they pose less of a threat?

The only problem I had with this production was the extremely loud soundtrack, especially the drone music, which I think was intended to reflect the performer's increasingly manic state of mind. It did do this very effectively, but there were occasions when her words were, at least for me, drowned out.

Recommended (so long as you don't have an allergy to clouds of talcum powder).

Baby Face is at the Demonstration Room, Summerhall (Venue 26) at 1.30pm until 26 August (no shows on 5, 13 and 20 August.)
Tickets £9/£7 here:

<https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on#q=%22Baby%20Face%22>

Katy Dye's website is www.katy-dye.com.



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