

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 REVIEW- On the Exhale

Brutally heart wrenching, *On the Exhale*, by Martin Zimmerman explores the impact of gun violence through one woman's emotional reflection. This is a monologue which feels highly personal as we are present to her inner most thoughts and compulsions.

We are also helpless bystanders as the ruthless and unforgiving power of the gun is exercised in her life and watch as she consequently loses her sense of self. Directed by Christopher Hayden and starring Polly Frame, this is a piece which cannot help but remain lodged in the mind.

On the Exhale is contextualised in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting of 2012 and most recently the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting of early 2018. This is a play which contributes to the ongoing debate about the use of guns in the US and cuts through the existent convoluted dialogue.



Offering clarity and a moral check, it asks 'who suffers at the hands of the gun?' before making the plea of 'how many more?' Ultimately, it explores how those most unable to defend themselves are those targeted. Her words can't help but provoke thought about the devastating power of guns in so many communities.

The woman is a nameless figure; she represents many women and many parents. Through her internal dialogue a whole world is created before us. The language is rich and emotive; she is able to convey intensely how she has lost a part of herself. The silences as the woman practices breathing, resonate as equally powerfully, enabling her performance to grip until the very end.

The stage is otherwise bare apart from the woman and the beams laden on the floor. Glowing in an ebb and flow of electricity, they have the power to light up in alignment with the rhythm of her speech and yet also jolt violently. This juxtaposition is highly symbolic of the fragile state of her self; vulnerable, open to sudden attack and then break down. As the pattern of light is broken on stage, the woman's state of mind is also destroyed. The poles themselves are able to represent many things; the unstable self, the bodies of those victim to gun violence and the guns themselves which hold the power.

Of course, this is not a story which exists only for another time, it is one we know very well because it is our present reality. On the Exhale is a play that brings the heartbreak of gun violence to our very doors; it doesn't just happen to other people and it doesn't just exist far away. A desperately sad yet a desperately needed production.