



By Alex Bailey Dillon | © 11th Aug 2023 | ★★★★★



By the time the lipstick went on, I was hooked. Which is remarkable, because by the time the lipstick went on, Maureen herself hadn't quite arrived yet. Writer and performer Jonny Hawkins had simply appeared on the brocaded stage and explained that this show was not a biography of his friend Maureen, but rather was an amalgamation and a tribute to her and the whole class of older, indomitable, glamorous women whom they knew and loved. With that, they started dropping into character, and a moment later, Maureen settled into her chair.



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When I say brocaded, by the way, I mean brocaded, from the very top of House of Oz's two story space in the King's Hall all the way to the footlights, very much including the armchair and side table that formed the only set. The lush patterning transformed and dominated the space, much like the woman who it instantly evoked. Such visual richness is rare at the Fringe and is a great credit to designer Isobel Hudson and the venue, House of Oz. It's not the only way *Maureen* breaks the Fringe mold – the show is 80 full minutes. It's an unusual choice, but I personally wouldn't give up a single one of them, and I'm glad Hawkins and House of Oz didn't either.

What the confidence exuded by the run time, the set, and Hawkins' unhurried performance achieves is a feeling I'm sure will be familiar to many – the feeling of sitting across from an older relative, or perhaps a family friend, who is holding court. If you're a smiling young man in the front row, you might especially feel that way. There isn't so much audience interaction as there is a spilling over of the conversation into the first few rows. And it does *feel* like a conversation even though Maureen does all the talking, which is a remarkable accomplishment, oft attempted but rarely achieved. Maureen transcends time and space, weaving stories of her life planted in a fourth-floor apartment in an ever-changing neighborhood.

I feel unusually and deeply resistant to saying much of anything else about the content of *Maureen*. Its essence is the feeling of love – the love of Hawkins for their friends, the love of Maureen for hers, and the immediate and rapturous love of the audience for Maureen, may she live forever. The gift that Hawkins and co-creator Nell Ranney give us is a beautiful reminder to live our lives to the fullest, to love fiercely, and to make that visit we've been promising to make to the older people in our lives. Absolutely do not miss it.