

Edinburgh Fringe comedy reviews – Anna Piper Scott: Such an Inspiration

Anna Piper Scott's UK debut show is dark, playful, effortless and imaginative (just don't call it inspirational), while Fringe veteran Frank Skinner by contrast falls back on tired old tropes

By Jay Richardson

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Anna Piper Scott: Such an Inspiration *****

House of Oz (The Great Indoors) (Venue 73)

Whatever else Anna Piper Scott's UK debut show is, and it is much, and mighty, it's tremendous stand-up. Full of memorable routines, sprinkled with great gags but related with a warm, inclusive ease and puckish, occasionally acerbic, playfulness, taking sometimes difficult and dark subject matter and making it light for the most part, yet affording it suitable gravity when required, intricate but wonderfully effortless storytelling. Such an Inspiration is inherently, intensely personal, but has so much to say about contemporary identity issues, culture wars, mental health, queer representation and the purpose of comedy. Hannah Gadsby's watershed stand-up show *Nanette* gets a couple of namechecks. And although *Inspiration* is perhaps not that much of a gamechanger, it's very much on a similar scope of accomplishment and other spectrums besides.

Leant on harder than Gadsby are three of Scott's all-times heroes, comedians Dave Chappelle and Adam Hills and the Australian's housemate, Eli. Since transitioning to be a trans woman, Scott noticed that crowd reactions towards her have changed, with progressive audience members telling her, to her horror, that she was "inspirational". And in their own ways, legendary comic-turned-hack transphobe Chappelle, supportive ally Hills and self-identifying "chaos demon" Eli now offer inspiration to Scott for how she might exceed that limiting label. Weaving these through Hollywood's stock narrative arcs for trans women, that of punchline, villain or victim, she establishes a solid, structural framework to explore the possibilities and limits of these archetypes.

Serving the greater whole, plenty of Scott's routines are nevertheless sublime in isolation, with a section about trans women in sport and the rare professions where women earn more than men, thoroughly researched, winningly opinionated and just densely, impishly funny. Scott draws almost all of the thorny controversy out of certain aspects with self-deprecation

and relatability – her admission of her autism is masterfully deft in this regard – but retains enough grit in the oyster to just every now and then strike back against those that would oppress her. Typical is the celebratory line she takes when she's thoroughly mansplained to about comedy.

From an early and occasional mention of hospitalisation, you are though, waiting throughout for the other shoe to drop. And when Scott shares her recent trauma, it's been skilfully seeded enough to not feel like a theatrical device, but part of an ongoing, organic process of affirmation – one of those rare examples where the show and the person behind it genuinely seem to be coming together and re-emerging stronger before your eyes. Incredible.

Jay Richardson - 15th August 2023

