

The Event

★★★★

Sophie Layton (she/her)

“Without the approval & praise of strangers, he won’t be able to do this for much longer”. Consider the praise plentiful & forthcoming, sir, for your show is remarkable.

With my 50s-style dress coincidentally matching the opening soundtrack, was it by fate that I had found myself sitting in a darkened room staring at this man in the spotlight, a lone person in the empty void of the rest of the space? Put simply, it must have been, for *The Event* is an elegant, refreshing piece of spoken word performance that contextualises this funny industry that we all find ourselves in, & forces us to appreciate the minutiae of what brings a performance to life.

“The man is Mike”, & his show, put simply, is an hour-long monologue; a third-person perspective imparted by a first-person performer, that is both challenging & calming, juxtaposing forces that I have never seen combined so effortlessly & to such a successful degree. Describing his own performance & the metaphysics that hold a show together in an audio description-like tone, his refrains are not only philosophical but characterised to perfection; you cannot help but fall in love with his witty quips & self-awareness.

His major skill comes in an effortless ability to cast vibrant imagery into the mind of an enamoured audience. A near-blank black stage lit sparingly & featuring only himself or a prop or two gives viewers the chance to conjure striking scenes before our very eyes, with little direction or encouragement. His soothing, relaxing intonation as an unrivalled wordsmith & orator is refreshing; a slow, low-energy production that akin to a fresh sorbet in the chaotic busyness of the wider Fringe Festival. I felt physically & emotionally relaxed, yet suitably intellectually challenged, a state I’m not sure I’ve ever felt so completely before this moment.

This is also one of the first shows that I have seen where the performer takes time to appreciate the people behind the productions; those not seen on stage. Featuring extensive discussion of his stagehand Frankie, & his technician, to appreciative callouts of the audience, promoters, venue staff, & indeed critics, his openness & vulnerability as a performer comes to the fore, despite his remarkable ability to monologue continuously for an entire hour, with no supporting or backup performers. “Observers have a great deal of power”, he says, & whilst the critics of one’s work, like myself, “could be morons” as he so eloquently put it, his surrendering of himself to his audience & viewers is a testament to his comfort on stage, a comfort that is certainly well-placed.

Early on, ‘the man’ as he refers to himself throughout, tells us that “this is some sort of art thing & if you want to leave, that’s fine”. I can duly testify that *The Event* is in fact an art thing, a blissful exploration of self that demonstrates his ability as a performer with a grace & decorum that evokes a David Suchet-like mannerism in his every move. And not

a single person left, at his direction or otherwise. Common courtesy? Maybe. But more likely because *The Event*'s elegance & charm was a captivating ode to theatre, & the people who make it happen, & why would you leave something so special of your own will?