

Review of The Ins and Outs of Fingers and Spoons in an Open Marriage

Where to begin?

Let's just put it on the table to start; this is a play that deals unflinchingly with sex. And in this capable artist's hands that would likely be plenty to provide an enjoyable evenings diversion. And while sex does provide the maypole around which the play dances, there is a whole lot more going on here. This is no mere collection of naughty tales to titillate.

It's a tale of self-discovery of a woman, encouraged by an absent husband, entering an open-marriage. It's a tale of personal liberation. No, wait, it's *Pascale's* tale of personal liberation. Even though told in the third-person form as "Mom", Pascale clearly owns her story.

And that's where this solo performance, for me, is so winning. Personal liberation is uncertain, alternately exhilarating and painful, and this play walks a swaying tightrope through it all. The script, down to the turns of phrase, is clever enough that this play easily (and fortunately) transcends the realm of self-confessional. Along with Pascale's physicality as a performer, playing a handful of characters throughout, this play roundly comes out as sex-positive, person-positive, and highly relatable.

What makes this play so worthwhile, so relatable, is that Pascale places sex within the larger context of a life going through some difficult changes. Sex, love, marriage, parenting, self-image, vulnerability and submission, self-determination and agency; a life in transition. The play is all the better for deftly going through a few fairly stark places on its way to liberation.

The Ins and Outs of Fingers and Spoons in an Open Marriage is thrilling, tough, and a deep joy.

So now, where to end?

When I saw it I had no more to go on than the title and an invitation. Some how I feel that I need to relate my experience of going to see the performance.

I'm a SWM, 60, hippy motorcycle riding grocer by trade, writer, singer, painter, mountaineer. Third marriage is the charm. Two kids by my first wife. Between marriages I got around *quite* a bit. I've been in a few plays with the SF Buffoons.

My wife works at the Gregangelo Museum, where the play is going to be. All I know is the name of the play and that it's alleged to be sexy. Sounds great, count me in.

We arrive at the museum, which takes up the entirety of Gregangelo's San Francisco residence. The play is being held in the Eclipse Room next to the Sensorium, where in most houses you'd likely find the dining room. Seating set up for about a dozen. Greg and Marcello are the only ones I know as the place fills.

There is someone coming and going from the kitchen, talking with the sound person. This must be the performer, Pascale. As showtime gets nearer she is alternately walking a little more briskly around the room shaking off nerves and sitting meditatively on the part of the floor to serve as the stage while people who all mostly know each other are mingling. This is my first little delight and the play hasn't even started; I know that crazy feeling, is it excitement or anxiety, before starting your show.

Greg has a few (several) words to say of welcome and introduction, and the play begins.

As regards the storyline itself, it's semi-linear with a strong central series of events interwoven and juggled with many flashbacks and forwards. Once again, another delight for me; as a writer I appreciate a non-rigid timeline. The sexy parts are sexy as hell, the painful parts clear and forceful, the humor sly, the fragility and endurance unavoidable. Really wonderful storytelling.

But storytelling can be done from a sofa. And that probably would be enough given the story being told. But, oh my goodness, Pascale's *performance*, holy mother of pearl wow! It's a small room and, yes, I did my best not to wiggle and squirm in my seat through some of the steamier parts. But steamy or not, as someone who's been on the Fringe stage, I was mesmerized by Pascale's big expressive use of her body, not only to bounce seamlessly from character to character, but also in a way harkening back to the roots of Performance Art; using the dynamic shapes of one's body in a given space as a form of expression in itself. In the show I saw, using only a stool as a prop, she takes us such places as discovering herself with a mirror, a difficult talk with her lover, and a dark time with her husband and son, among others, and each, for me was a delight to watch. It's so much more of an experience than storytelling.

As a performer in a small room you catch the eye of people seated in front of you. It's natural, a little like looking at the camera, and it keeps you from playing to the ceiling. I tend to have "strong eyes," especially when I'm having as much fun as I am this evening. So in this small room Pascale's and my eyes tend to lock frequently. Sitting next to my beloved wife I just try to sit still, beam, and enjoy the show, but damn, I feel like I'm plugged into an electrical socket.

So after the performance folks are hanging out, drinking wine, and chatting. I am decidedly *not* talking to Pascale, at least not for the moment, not this charged up. All I would want to talk about would be sex, which would not be a good lead in. I drink wine, Pascale talks to most everyone else.

I forget how, but of course we end up talking. I'm fairly determined not to talk sex because I feel that my eyes are far too radiant and might be magnetic. I tell Pascale how much I enjoyed the writing, all the way down to the turns of phrase, which support the work without being showy for its own sake. I reference Tom Robbins, always sex-positive, who can turn a hell of a phrase, even if he's also a show-off. We chat and I feel like we're in some sort of semi-permeable vortex. We spoke together for a while, but I couldn't tell you what else we talked about. Maybe I mentioned being in the Buffoons, I don't know.

A few days later word comes to me; Pascale asked Gregangelo to ask Monica to ask me (and anyone else who was there) if we would be willing to write a review of the play.

I'm honored and tickled. Thank you, Pascale.

Reviewed by Mars Wind