



Adelaide Theatre Guide

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NOT A VERY GOOD STORY

Alia Vryens

Bakehouse Theatre – Studio

Until 12 Mar 2016

Review by Paige Mulholland

With a name like “not a very good story” and a beginning that includes a clunky projector, a bumbling host and a long and tedious story about a call centre, it seemed like all hopes for a great show were dashed. But before long, the bumbling host becomes a loveable storyteller, the long and tedious story became a fascinating and poignant one, and the clunky projector, well, stays a clunky projector. But one thing is certain; “not a very good story” is a pretty inaccurate name.

May Jasper plays Stephanie, an awkward, shy, loving call-centre worker, who returns to work after completing breast cancer treatments. After she returns, the women on her floor start to notice a pattern – more and more of them are getting breast cancer, more than should be possible. Stephanie and the women on her floor try to protect others from suffering too, despite the fact that nobody wants to listen – not management, not the cancer associations, not even Stephanie’s partner, Jen.

Based on real life instances of “cancer clusters”, “not a very good story” is a moving look at serious issues like life, illness, and the sacrifices we make for those we love, but it’s also surprisingly funny with reflections on uncomfortable social interactions, “Finding Nemo”, and a song about electric eels making love.

Jasper’s performance is one of the few “orchestrated awkward” performances that doesn’t feel orchestrated at all (aside from the faux fall at the beginning, which was a little on the nose). She does a great job of making the audience feel comfortable as she starts her story with what seems like just another quirky day at the office, and weaves in the more serious details. Jasper does this so subtly that the audience barely notice as the balance of the show shifts from being funny to being serious and a little heartbreaking.

“not a very good story” does subtlety well, with great atmospheric audio and simple lighting. The show is no-frills, certainly, but it doesn’t need them; especially not if the wild cheers (and quiet tears) from the Bakehouse Studio’s tiny audience is anything to go by.

Stories about cancer, stories where older women play major roles, and stories about LGBTIQ characters where the characters are more than their sexuality. These kinds of tales are rare in theatre, even in a festival as diverse and colourful as the Adelaide Fringe, but they are important. “not a very good story” is unassuming, unpretentious, sweet, funny, and very moving. It is, in short, a very good story.

Rating: 5 stars (out of 5)