

Bitter Lemons - a poignant fable, timely told: lady into fox @ the hollywood fringe festival

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June 15, 2015 by [jonathan ross](#)



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I very rarely use the word charming to describe much of anything. This is mostly due to the fact that I am rarely charmed. For something to qualify as such, it must strike a nearly impossible balance between the familiar and the magical, the simple and the profound. *Lady into Fox*, a modern story-theater adaptation of David Garnett's underrated 1922 novella with pictures, proves not only to be an undeniably charming and satisfying hour of theater, it accomplishes these feats with very limited resources. What writer and director Sam Hunter and his cast of three have created with *Lady into Fox* is quite special; a timely fable told with

clear and creative theatricality that speaks to nearly everyone, while refusing almost entirely to be pandering.

As this is a relatively straight forward narrative, and a lovely and beguiling one at that (think Exupery's *Little Prince*), I will keep the summarizing to a minimum. Although the plot of *Lady into Fox* is by no means unpredictable, the few twists the story takes and the many creative bits of staging this production creates would be a shame to spoil prematurely.

Essentially the story is this; Richard and Silvia are happily married living in an un-named place near the edge of the woods. On a walk together through those woods one evening, Silvia without warning or explanation transforms into a fox. At first, both parties are bewildered, even terrified, yet their love for one another keeps them by each others side. Richard takes Silvia home, fires the maid and shoots their two excitable pet dogs. Finally able to think, he and Silvia go about trying to figure out how their relationship will now be conducted with one half of the equation no longer a human.

At first, they try to deny Silvia's transformation, putting her in dresses and having her daintily use her paws to eat with at the table. With the passing of each new day however, Silvia becomes less and less human and more and more like a fox. As the couple tries to reconcile their love for one another in the face of such bizarre and unlikely odds, they are forced to explore with the lines between primal and proper, between human and animal.

All of this may sound rather silly, or even worse, overly twee or precious, but the story and staging of *Lady into Fox* while whimsical, remains far from superficial. A dark existential current runs just beneath this story's facade, one that is only heightened by the story-theater infrastructure of this production.

All three members of the cast are excellent and each of them has multiple moments to gain the audience's trust and affection.

Nathan Turner manages to find a balance between Richard's child-like romantic notions and his more neurotic social anxieties. His performance is surprisingly

three-dimensional and empathetic considering the confines of the play's style. Although his slip into emotional turmoil could have perhaps grown a few shades darker than it's allowed to here, he is none the less thoroughly engaging throughout.

Claire Kaplan does a masterful job as Silvia. Without the use of any costume pieces (except for that of a simple dress) without any elaborate or overwrought physicality, she guides us through her physical transformation and the rest of her performance with grace and ease. Kaplan makes many bold choices as Silvia and the fact that I never once questioned what this woman was doing playing a fox speaks to her accomplishments.

Playing Mrs. Cork, Silvia's housekeeper, as well a selection of animals, Spencer Devlin Howard shows great physical and comedic prowess, with smart attention to detail and a surprising sense of restraint. What could have easily turned into a groan-fest or felt like bad children's theater never goes there and Howard, literally single-handedly, keeps the world around Silvia and Richard intact.

Leland Montgomery's understated set create just enough mood and atmosphere to sustain the story. He does so with just stacks of books, a few lamps, a couple rugs, two wooden stools and a simplistic chandelier of branches that throws forest-like shadows upon the walls. Though I wish the theater lights had been just a hair dimmer and the lights from the chandelier and lamps a bit more prominent, Montgomery's setting, outlined with pillows and cushions for the audience to sit on, was just enough to prove transportive and home-like at the same time.

Sam Hunter wrote and directed this adaptation of *Lady into Fox* and his work goes to show how far one can get with clarity of vision and consistency of style. There are a few brief moments that place unnecessary contemporary references inside the timeless world of his play. There is also a totally contrived pretense that presents the story as the true account of an urban legend. Those shortcomings aside the material speaks perfectly well for itself and these two distractions as a result do more to distance us, than draw us in.

Luckily though, these moments are few and far between and could likely be cut out and re-structured in less than an hour. What proves equally self-aware yet far more successful are the few moments that Hunter chooses to use music in his play. There is one scene in particular that starts with Richard and Silvia at the piano and leads us from there into the kind of moment we could only share together in the theater. This was the moment that I fell for *Lady into Fox*.

Hunter and his small creative team have managed to build their own little world out of words and gestures. It is refreshing and inspiring to be reminded that sometimes, in the theater, that is all you really need.

Future Performances of *Lady into Fox* take place on The Elephant Space stage at Theatre Asylum, located at 6322 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles Ca. 90038.

Remaining Performances are:

Thursday, June 18th @ 11:30pm

Sunday, June 21st @ 5:30pm

Friday, June 26th @ 7:00pm

Saturday, June 27th @ 1:00pm

For more information click [here](#).

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