

Jalopy offers poignant one-woman show

by Sofia Balayut

On a Monday night, around 30 people gathered at Red Hook's cozy, warmly-lit Jalopy Theatre to see Francesca Van Horne perform her one-woman show, *Tales from the Trundle*. Ms. Van Horne, who also wrote the show, sat stage right and peered out at the audience. But as soon as the lights went down and she began a quietly

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dramatic walk around the stage - which contained only a chair, a pair of black heels, and a gray blanket - she began the first of many convincing transformations.

Ms. Van Horne plays a slightly fictionalized version of herself named Valentina, as well as 12 other characters. Throughout the show, the audience sees Valentina’s marriage disintegrate

in the face of her abusive husband, Valentina’s attempts to find new love, and how she comes to find hope in herself.

The show feels intensely personal, more like a friend telling stories in a living room than a theatrical performance. Here, that quality is a strength. After the walk to center stage, the show opens with Valentina bundled in a blanket, shrinking into herself after a harrowing experience with her husband. This scene is artfully executed and almost uncomfortable in its emotional nakedness.

Valentina’s gradual development is also well done. Ms. Van Horne switches from the peppy, bubbly Valentina of the past to shouldering the weight of years of marriage in a few seconds, and the slow reappearance of Valentina’s smile subtly creates character development. Ms. Van Horne is also able to skilfully embody a number of different characters, from a SoulCycle instructor to a therapist to Bradley Cooper, with shifts in her posture and vocal inflection.

The writing is also moving for the most part, never losing the power of simple, honest lines. When Valentina reflects on her husband, she says, “I thought I could love him into healing.” The script also gives new meaning to the phrase “I come here all the time” at the end of the show.



One of Van Horne’s transformations at the Jalopy Theater. (photo by Jeffrey Smith Georges)

However, there are a few aspects of *Tales from the Trundle* that hold it back. Despite the indications of place (Valentina’s story often takes her from the U.S. to France), lingering confusion about the logistics of living situations and divorce took me out of the moment. The last scene also feels unsatisfying. Valentina gives a brief monologue realizing her potential and leaving a second toxic relationship, but the development happens too quickly for all the struggle that preceded it. The potential for the unburdening of more truth is there, but

the script does not take advantage of it. A few other moments as well - telephone calls with a sister, interactions with men at a bar - stall the plot.

The emotion of the show saves it, though. Even with the different characters, Ms. Van Horne is always sure to tell Valentina’s story. She brings humanity and frankness to a situation so often fought through alone, and leaves on a message of hope. I left grateful for her to have shared it.

Francesca Van Horne will be performing Tales from the Trundle in Paris and London throughout July.