

ONE NIGHT STAND! – Hilarity Ensues with Christine Ferrera

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ONE NIGHT STAND SCENE REPORT BY THE TRIM MAGI

(Bad Oracle here: now proudly doing ONE NIGHT STANDS! These are special reports and/or reviews of one night or one off performances or shows. We want to celebrate what's happening in a variety of small arts scenes in Baltimore: performance art, comedy, burlesque, etc. For this first one night stand, we welcome correspondent The Trim Magi, who was THERE, y'all. He caught the inimitable comedy of Baltimore's own Christine Ferrera, who opened for some guy named Michael Ian Black on September 9th.)

The floor was crowded and the audience was boisterous on Sunday, September 9th, which brought a comedy show to the Ottobar stage featuring headliner Michael Ian Black (Wet Hot American Summer, Stella). But for us Baltimoreans who follow the local comedy scene, the evening carried an certain special significance. That's because opening for Black was local performance artist Christine Ferrera, who has pumped hilarity into our city for years but, unfortunately, rarely alongside nationally renowned figures.

Wait – pause. Do we call Christine Ferrera a performance artist? Or a stand-up? Or um, does “performance comic” work for everyone?

If you've never seen Ferrera, maybe you've seen Maria Bamford – whose claustrophobic self-awareness and verbose narratives are performed in front of a live audience, solo, with jokes, but only half-feels like stand-up. Or maybe you've seen Dynasty Handbag, whose solo material is largely comedic in nature but feels so rooted in societal critique that, if forced to define it, one might call it “funny performance art.” Or take contemporary goof Dimitri Martin, whose Seinfeld-on-'ludes persona is so detached that, while funny, doesn't exactly place him on a bill with a more traditional stand-up like Ali Wong.

Ferrera's similarly rigorous with her crafted style (delivering each line as if about to fall asleep during her own powerpoint presentation), but presents humor of greater nuance and bite. It's this combination of crafted persona and layered meaning that differentiates Ferrera from anything that's gonna inspire applause from the Thursday night Magooby's crowd. Ferrera makes more sense alongside that of the Wham City Comedy troupe (who she has toured with) – and, for that matter, the hyper-ambivalence of Michael Ian Black's former comedy project, Stella.

Take her opening joke, which pretty much encapsulated her absurdist comic premises and quiet self-loathing. For it, she described a frappuccino order from Starbucks for a pinch too long, even including a loving description of its toasted coconut garnish. But her joy came crashing down as she delivered the punchline in her characteristic monotone: “I don't really like myself.”

“I love art that makes you think,” Ferrera later shared with the audience, in a tone that ironically suggests this is a unique and meaningful statement. “I like noise music. I love blurry photography. I love the clumsy ballet.” While Ferrera's work is often spiked with artworld in-jokes, it isn't difficult to imagine her poking fun at the DIY creative culture here in Bmore that spawned her.

In fact, one of the factors that make Ferrera seem so performative is that the art world is a consistent point of reference. Her visual art – which can be viewed on her website – often explores the intersection between the global economy, feminism and art.

But in her comedy, almost every one of her jokes contains an underlying feminist critique of culture and relationships. “My boyfriend is a second wave men’s rights activist,” she deadpans to the game audience. “So the other day he was mansplaining the patriarchy to me. But,” and here she switches to a cartoon cavewoman: “Me no think good.”

She then adds “My boyfriend is great at talking; he’s like an artist, but for words,” nimbly skewering the inflated self-importance of the male ego.

Just don’t mistake Ferrera’s stand-up for, say, the work of Hannah Gadsby, whose monumental Netflix special “Nannette” – performance art in its own right – bravely stripped away jokes in order to reveal unapologetic truth. Ferrera might poke at uncomfortable topics (heroin, Hillary Clinton, dating younger men) but her claws remain mostly concealed beneath her charm and composed demeanor, even if we sense their presence throughout. “I suffer from body dysmorphia,” is not usually a set-up to a joke. But neither is the punchline: “When I look in the mirror, all I see is a Scandinavian desk.”

For his performance, Black kept loose and improvisational – riffing back and forth with members of his enthusiastic fanbase. One got the sense that he had more developed material at hand, but preferred to spend the evening stretching and relaxing his comedic muscles – certainly enjoying his status as a nationally renowned comedian with the ability to just stand on a stage and receive thunderous applause. Pairing Black and Ferrera was smart – perhaps arranged by aimable everyman Mike Moran, who MC’ed the evening.

Alluding to the comedy world and joking about her presence in it, Ferrera quipped: “I’m considered by many to be the female Carrot Top.” And when the audience laughed, it was because, well, many of them realized that not only was it not true, but that they’d never seen anything like Christine Ferrera before.

Christine Ferrera is performing throughout the country in the coming months. Check this out <https://www.christineferrera.net/contact> (<https://www.christineferrera.net/contact>) for videos or more information.