

Last night brought the 3rd of 5 performances of *Beneath The Dress*, a new cabaret show by [Frances Ruffelle](#).



I scored a ticket to this after having been intrigued by a handbill at the Pleasance Theatre the other night. Ruffelle has been performing on stage for many years now, having won a Tony award for her turn in *Les Miserables* several years back. She has heaped up a career's worth of awards in a fairly short time, and at age 42 has pretty much pivoted to a recording career.

This show was billed with this memorable little poem:

*I must confess
there's an emptiness
each night the music ends
underneath the mess
and beneath the dress
I'm best when I pretend.*

Well, I can tell you this, she delivered on the underneath the dress bit, performing almost the entire show in her unmentionables; prancing around the stage in various stages of undress, complicated by the numerous costume changes (think Cher) all performed centre stage.

It is worth mentioning that yet again **Pawn** was one of the few straight men in attendance.

Her act was incredibly well put together, with very tight musical arrangements and a very capable band. Accompanying her were sax/clarinet, trumpet and trombone, drums, stand-up bass and keyboards. Her daughter, who goes by the stage name Elisa Doolittle, joined in for one number. Quite nice.

The act felt like a blend of Judy Garland and Sarah Brightman. Brightman, at least in what I have seen, plays the remote diva, while Ruffelle is anything but detached. She obviously loves what she is doing, and that comes across on stage in a way which simply cannot be faked. Her eyes always shimmer, her moves are so sure it is almost surreal, and every little movement seems to have been if not choreographed at least very well considered.

I must give a special nod to her rendition of *Mood Indigo*, the classic Duke Ellington song. She captured the sometimes difficult minor-key transitions masterfully, and her band never crowded her on the more delicately phrased passages.

There are two performances left for this show, June 3rd and 14th, and I recommend it to anyone who has the opportunity to attend. Madame Jojo's at 8-10 Brewer Street in Soho are a wonderful venue for this show.

*If I'm no longer needed
and I must take my leave
I'll go with a smile
My exit music please*