



Battersea Arts Centre, the Great Hall, before the fire

Friday morning and I haven't written a thing since Tuesday.Â Must fix that.
Tuesday evening was Bryony Kimmings' *I'm A Phoenix, Bitch* at Battersea Arts Centre, itself a bit of a Phoenix.Â Friday the 13th March, 2015, fire broke out in the roof of Battersea's Great Hall.



Mandatory Credit: Photo by REX (4527938a)

Fire at Battersea Arts Centre

Battersea Arts Centre on fire, London, Britain - 13 Mar 2015

A major fire has broken out at Battersea Arts Centre, a leading independent theatre and arts venue in south London.

The entire rear third of the building was lost, but with steely grit and unflagging determination, and loads of support from the community, BAC rose from the ashes. It held a public event in the (relatively) unscarred front of the building just 26 hours after the fire was extinguished, and this year marks their "Phoenix Season." More of the building than ever before is open to the public and in active use.



Byony Kimmings is a performance artist. In 2016 she was beset by a series of tragedies which, together, nearly broke her. Her and her partner bought a tumbledown cottage, in the middle of nowhere, to settle their new small family, but post partum depression had a grip on her. Then her son, Frank, began to suffer unexplained seizures, and she and her partner began to disintegrate. This is the story Bryony presents to us through an intriguing and fascinating set of theatrical devices.



Not content just to talk to the audience, ala Spalding Grey, another performance artist best known for turning life into narrative, Brynony has four small “sets,” initially covered by sheets, around the performance space, and the back wall is black scrim. One by one she undrapes the small sets, one a kitchen counter with backdrop, another a bed, etc. She rolls a camera on tripod up to marks before each set, settles into the set, and on with makeup, wigs, etc. In each she performs a mini-sketch which brings us into her mind for the “morning after the night before” with her new love (kitchen) or the pregnancy and birth (bed). We can watch her working within the cleverly designed sets, or watch her on the video, projected onto the scrim. We can enter her story, or observe it, or both.

The most interesting of these small sets is a model of the small cottage and the hill upon which it stands. Fans of model railroads will recognize the construction materials; Norwegian moss, sawdust drass, etc. It’s strikingly realistic, and we are brought into it by Bryony wielding a small video camera as she narrates their occupancy of the home, acting it out with small dolls.

I’ve described some of the tools and techniques Kimmings uses, but what I cannot do is describe much of the story, or the more awesome stage effects. This is due to my respect for the artist’s prerogative that the show not be revealed too much to prospective future audiences. I will say that it was a deeply moving story, told with unique story telling tools, and bursts with vision from a singular creative mind. Some day I may post a photo or two, but for now this will do.



Much thanks to a pair of Phoenix; Battersea Arts Centre and Byony Kimmings.