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Dispatches from The Fringe - Hopelessly devoted to Ruth 66

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Ruth 66

Fourth Leaf Theatre Company

Ruth 66

Rating: ★★★★★

Meet Ruth, the hapless romantic, anti-clown on a road trip across America. With her two best buds, a Satellite Navigation System called Earll and a blow up sex doll called Kimberly, Ruth sets out for the bright lights of Las Vegas. In between, Mid-America awaits, overflowing with kissable cowboys, drive thru funeral homes, dehydrated coke and 1800 numbers that will confirm what you already know. In *Ruth 66*, winner of Best Female Performer at the Dublin Fringe Festival 2012, Ruth Lehane returns with a gentle, little charmer whose lightness and laughs mask a thoughtful study of loneliness, longing and difference.

In Ruth's romanticized world, nowhere is more romantic than America. From the imagined fanfare that greets her arrival to pancakes and syrup, everything is just amazing. She thinks she'll like America and that America will like her. Like her Uncle Frank, who told her tales of bright lights and

big places and was okay with the fact that she was a blue shoe that can't be a brown shoe. In a world where radio stations encourage the rearing of children to fit the mold, Ruth's journey becomes less a discovery of America but rather a discovery and acceptance of herself.

Co - directed by Mikel Murfi and Antonio Gil Martinez, *Ruth 66* was tightly paced and delivered some memorable visual moments, none more so than Ruth's big American automobile. Ingeniously designed by Matt Guinnane and Andrew Clancy, Ruth's clown car is deserving of iconic status right up there with the Batmobile. Sound design by Ivan Birthistle and Vincent Doherty and Lighting Design by Barry McKinney were impeccable in their timing and transformed the small, black box space into a rich, imaginative landscape.

Lehane's equally imaginative script is charming and subtle, if overly dependent on stock jokes and clichés. Like the long running Moose gag throughout *Ruth 66*, many of the scripted jokes don't land as well as they might. These dominated scenes where Ruth, sitting in her car, engaged with voice over dialogue superbly delivered by Dermot Magennis. But, as Ruth declares, "physical comedy is probably more my thing," and when Lehane lets loose she is a sheer delight. Her Liver Dance routine, a la Little Miss Sunshine, for a Rose of Tralee contest was hilariously funny, as were her episodes with tequila, leaving you wanting more of Lehane at her physical, funny best.

Ruth 66 sneaks up on you unexpectedly, beguiling you with its warmth, humor and charm. A marvelous, magical, madcap tale, its obvious surface conceals a hidden heart, a thoughtful soul and many laughs, all held together by Lehane's terrifically engaging performance.

Ruth 66 by Fourth Leaf Theatre Company runs at Smock Alley Theatre until September 21st. Performance begins at 6.15 p.m. Admission is €13.00



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