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# Dispatches from the Fringe: '(Not) Belonging' is weird and wonderful

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(Not) Belonging by This is Happening  
*Photo used with kind permission of Tiger Dublin Fringe*

## (Not) Belonging by This is Happening

Rating: ★★★★★

Youth culture, subculture, micro-culture. Hipsters, Emos, Seapunks. Behind the externals of labels, music, oversized t-shirts, multi-coloured leggings and sea green hair by which some might identify themselves, a live human being hides in plain sight. One that yearns for someone to notice them, writes diaries or fills the twitterverse with personal tweets, suffers anxiety disorders and self-harms, or resorts to sexting strangers just to feel some connection to something or someone. In "(Not) Belonging," a touching and thought provoking devised work by This Is Happening, youth and its cultural self-branding comes under scrutiny in a raw, honest and deeply engaging production about living weird.

With its multidisciplinary approach, "(Not) Belonging" shows traces of visual art, live art installation

and performance art. But at its core are three central performances that drive the piece forward, telling fractured stories interspersed with often abstract and sometimes confusing wonderings, all fuelled by personal diaries, memories and tweets. Sorcha Flanagan recounts her infatuation with a boy when she was twelve who introduced her to My Chemical Romance. Áine O'Hara recounts her first real relationship along with its make ups, break ups and heartache. Matthew O'Dwyer, a former Seapunk, tells of the highs and lows of finding somewhere to belong, even if only online, and then looking for somewhere to fit again when it all disappears. In between, "(Not) Belonging" ventures into sensitive territories including self-harming, online sex and how the act of recounting a moment can diminish the memory of the original experience. Throughout, emphasis is on connecting, or failing to, with one other or with a group, and on connecting, or failing to, with oneself. Whoever that may be.

Always brave and painfully honest at times, "(Not) Belonging" was not without its problems, many of which might have been avoided by the inclusion of a director during their devising process. Staging wasn't always as strong as it could have been, with transitions often slow and performers masking each other on a few occasions. Lighting was hugely problematic and seemed to regularly miss cues. Perhaps because of its conversational realism, or perhaps because of its personal relevance, vocally all fell short on several occasions, with Flanagan and O'Dwyer being particularly hard to hear at times. Gemma McGuinness's set design, the centre piece of which was a large, oversized diary, didn't utilise the space or its clever centre piece to full effect. All of which detracted somewhat from an otherwise excellent experience.

In contrast, the often hyper-natural performances, after an initial nervous start, grew in stature as the piece progressed. Sorcha Flanagan was an absolute delight, her face full of such open expressiveness it read like a map of the heart. Áine O'Hara's subtle but understated honesty was deeply engaging. As was Matthew O'Dwyer, whose strength lay not only in what he said, but in what he didn't say, perhaps couldn't say, which always simmered just below the surface.

Always strongest when telling its personal stories "(Not) Belonging" takes an intelligent and deeply moving look at the quest for identity and belonging among twenty first century youth. Self-reflective without ever being self-pitying, it's imbued with a tender shyness and heartfelt honesty, with moments of emotional, visual and performative beauty. The winner may take it all. For the rest the quest goes on. "(Not) Belonging" gives voice to the seekers, reminding them they are never alone.

"(Not) Belonging" by This Is Happening runs at The [Samuel Beckett Theatre](#) as part of the Tiger Dublin Fringe till September 14th.

Show begins at 5.00 pm and 8.30 pm

Tickets: €14/€12

For further information go to the [Tiger Dublin Fringe](#)



**Chris O'Rourke**

Theatre Examiner

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