

Asta Leigh's BEFOK: A Clever One-Woman Dark Comedy About a Determined Actress Trying to Make It in Hollywood

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By *Robert St. Martin*

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Saturday at the Odyssey Theatre in West Los Angeles was the opening night of Asta Leigh's hilarious one-woman theater piece *BEFOK (or the Desperate Attempt to Impress Iñárritu)*. Academy Award-winning director Alejandro González Iñárritu's movies mean a lot to both writer/performer Asta Leigh, and to her new force-of-nature character, South African-born Lola Luvv. Lola swore she'd be a world-renowned actress by the age of 40, but that's in seven days and she's no closer to her goal than when she moved to Hollywood. The character Lola Luvv wants to have a leading role in Iñárritu's next film project and dreams of an Oscar-winning performance as an actress.

Asta Leigh created this character of Lola Luvv from South Africa, and a cut-down version of this play was part of this year's Hollywood Fringe Festival, where she worked with veteran storyteller Matt Ritchey to craft the disparate segments into a marvelous whole. In the performance, she walks people's dogs in Hollywood, but catches a glimpse of Alejandro Iñárritu at the Altadena Whole Foods. She considers this a sign that she is destined to play the lead in his new TV show *The One Percent*. She figures out where Iñárritu lives and goes to his house a few times to ring the doorbell and leave a message in the front door speaker system, but never manages to meet him in person.

Asta Leigh explained in an interview: "My play, *BEFOK* is very personal to me as it's inspired by my childhood trauma. I grew up in a household that was rife with alcoholism and domestic abuse. *BEFOK* really is a story about how this trauma can lead to tremendous isolation. Lola Luvv, the central character of the play is in a foreign place, with dreams of being a movie star. She's fun-loving, outrageous, and passionate in nature but is also at times her own worst enemy."

What follows in the play is a zany attempt by the character Lola Luvv to explain who she is and why she considers herself a truly talented actress. Asta Leigh, who is an unbelievable performer with a wide emotional range and boundless energy, delivers a tour de force manic ride through stages of determination and desperation. She starts out with her origins in South Africa where she explains that everything is "*befok*," the Afrikaans word for crazy, awesome, angry, cool, or simply "not right in the head" – although in ordinary parlance means "f*cked up." Of course, coming to Hollywood to pursue a career as an actress is equally "*befok*" – as we soon learn as she goes through dubious auditions and meets some strange characters. But Lola seems invincible despite the flubs and mishaps along the way.

Although serious issues are addressed, the play is at its core a comedy.

Laughter has been a great healer for me and I'm hoping that by experiencing BEFOK with me there are others that might benefit too. I'm appealing to those who understand the effects of such trauma and hoping you will support me in bringing this show to life so that I can share it with others.

Behind on her rent, she begs her landlord for a grace period (over the phone) and then finds a gig taking care of an eccentric man's chickens. The scenes with this unseen but obvious present chicken is hilarious, as Lola decides to take one of the fussier chickens that needs daily pills to stay with her in her apartment and she converses with it as if it is her best friend. She gets a short acting stint on the television soap opera playing the mother of a dying girl and does better than the director expected.

She learns about a party in the Hollywood Hills where Leonard DiCaprio supposedly will be present, and she manages to sneak in without being on the approved guest list. She hopes to meet DiCaprio although as one man tells her, she is far too old to be his type. She goes to the bathroom to freshen up and a woman offers her what she thinks is cocaine, but it turns out to be Ketamine. Of course, she ends up disoriented and a bit confused, but she manages to get the attention of a flirty cameraman at the party. He talks her into dropping by his swanky apartment for a little fun. Soon she discovers that his sexual interests are in the realm of S&M, and he wants to be disciplined with a riding crop. A parody of *51 Shades of Grey*, this scene like so many others in the play satirizes aspects of the Hollywood myth of the "casting couch."

Asta Leigh has constructed a play that is a true showcase of her range as an actress. *BEFOK* is an emotional roller coaster that is self-aware and clever in this one-woman performance. As the character Lola Luvv runs at high volume throughout most of the performance, it takes a full hour before she begins to crash from her illusory hopes of instant stardom. When things go badly and the bottom seems to fall out, there is always the typical Hollywood overdose possibility. But Lola's resilience will most likely triumph at the end – or so we hope, even when her dreams of a role in an *Iñárritu* film collapse.

For anyone who's pursued a career in Hollywood, it's a word with which they can identify – and it certainly applies to Lola. In conversation, Asta Leigh offered these thoughts: "Although serious issues are addressed, the play is at its core a comedy. Laughter has been a great healer for me and I'm hoping that by experiencing BEFOK with me there are others that might benefit too."

Asta Leigh is a multi-award-winning actress. Her career on stage and screen has spanned all the way from South Africa to London to Los Angeles. Not satisfied with the roles available for women, Asta began focusing on creating stories that inspire, educate, empower, and have the ability to bring additional perspectives. She acted in and co-produced the award-winning film *Sand Angels*, *League of Legend Keepers*, *Running on Empty* and *Perception* and played a pivotal part in the film *Heirloom*, directed by Paul Walter Hauser who can be seen in Academy Award nominated films *I*, *Tonya* and *Blackkkklansman*.

BEFOK is at the Odyssey Theatre, October 21 through November 5, on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8 pm; Sundays at 4 pm. The Odyssey Theatre is located at 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd, in West Los Angeles. Ticket prices are \$30. For tickets, call (310) 477-2044, Ext. 2 or go to: www.OdysseyTheatre.com.