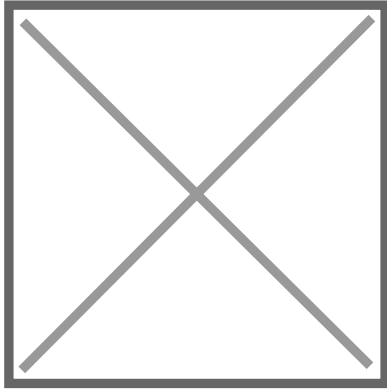




Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival Review: In My Room by Laura Elise Chapman

Description

A solo show that opens by calling its own audience â??a bunch of pervs,â?• and then, without changing tone, tells them the truth: this isnâ??t the show they think they bought a ticket to. Itâ??s an exorcism.

A note before you start: *In My Room* is a comedy, and this review reflects that, but the show moves through real, specific harm: religious shame around Chapmanâ??s body that starts when she is a child, a dismissive medical response to an STI diagnosis, a non-consensual sexual encounter, and a period of suicidal ideation that led to a psychiatric hospitalization. Chapman narrates all of it herself, on her own terms, often with a joke close behind. This review follows her lead, but read it and see the show at whatever pace is right for you. If any of this is close to home right now, thatâ??s worth knowing before you go further, not a reason to stay away from either the show or this piece, just something to walk in prepared for.

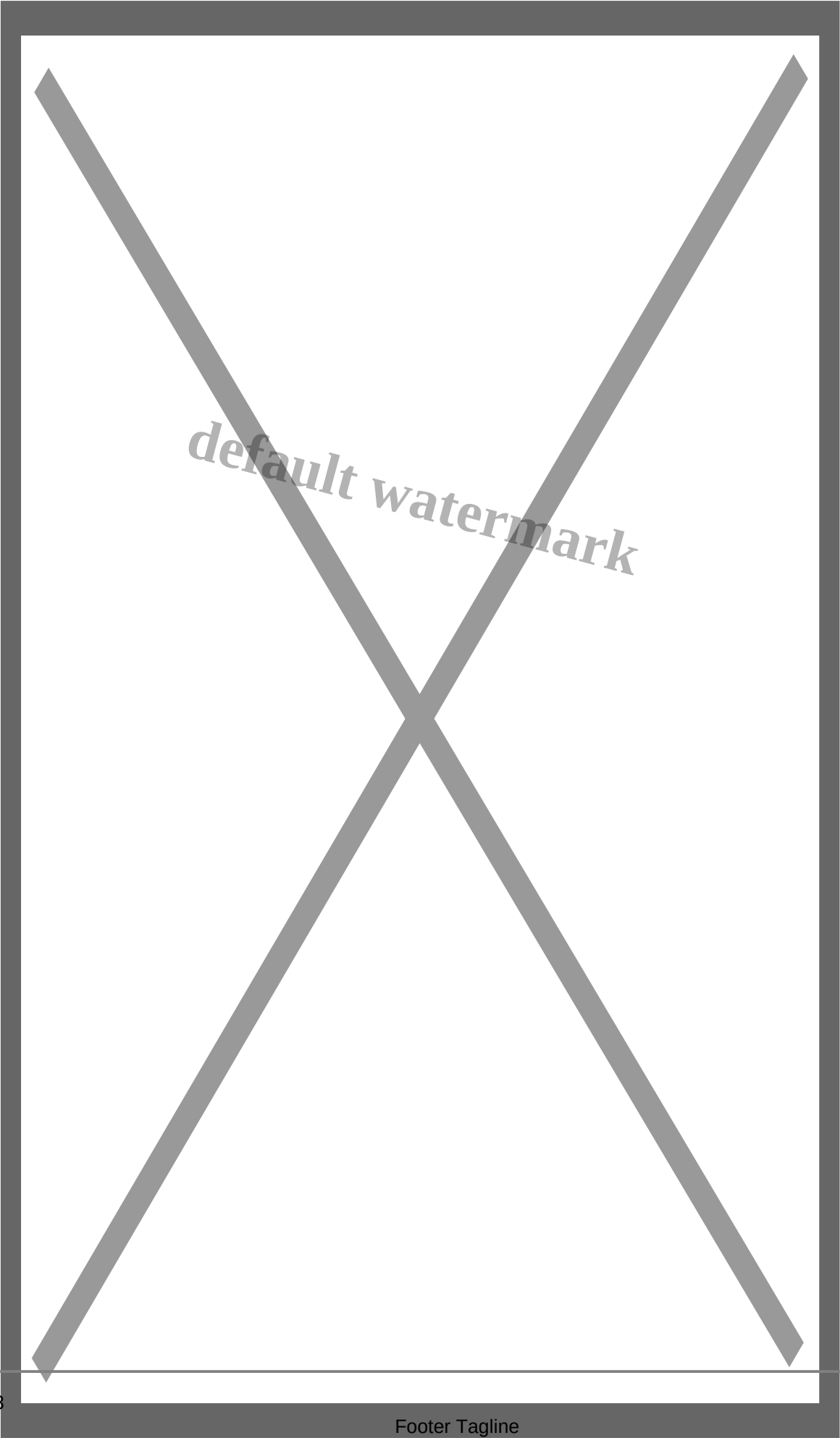
SALT LAKE CITY, UTâ??*In My Room*, Laura Elise Chapmanâ??s world premiere solo show, closed its run at Great Salt Lake Fringe as a Fringe Pick, a strong outcome for any debut, and a pointed one for a show this candid about leaving Mormonism, staged in a city where that departure carries real social weight. The premise is disarmingly simple and, once itâ??s set in motion, hard to shake: Chapman has nine years of therapy behind her, a witch named Bob shows up anyway, and the two of them strike a deal. Gather the right ingredients, Bob tells her, and the potion will let her be reborn. What Chapman actually gathers, over the next hour, is her own life: in fragments, staged as a ritual rather than narrated as a memoir. This is an artist putting it all out there, in the most literal sense the phrase allows, and the show only works because that vulnerability is matched by a carefully built theatrical structure.

The Potion as Structure

The device is not just a framing joke, though it is that too (Bobâ??s name alone tells you this show has no interest in being precious about its own mysticism). Itâ??s also the thing doing the real dramaturgical labor. A potion recipe can hold together ingredients that have no business sitting in the same pot: a five-year-old staging elaborate grieving-widow scenarios with her dolls, set to a Chicks song, belongs nowhere near an account of a non-consensual encounter in her twenties, except that the show has

already told you, structurally, that everything here is just an ingredient. That flattening is a genuine risk. It's also, I think, the show's most honest formal choice: nothing in a life actually arrives pre-sorted into "the light stuff" and "the heavy stuff." Chapman's potion basket refuses to sort it for you either.

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Ingredient One: A Doll Named Laura

The first thing into the basket is childhood itself, or the version of it a five-year-old builds out of dolls and devastation. Chapman describes praying nightly to be turned into a mermaid and waking up disappointed every morning it hadn't worked, a small, private ritual failure that the show's grown-up potion-making later mirrors almost exactly. She'd stage her dolls through orphan and grieving-mother scenarios, but nothing did it for her quite like playing grieving widow, all of it set to a Chicks song, acted out with a stuffed puppy and a girl doll. It's the funniest ingredient in the basket and also the one that quietly sets the show's terms: even before anything has gone wrong, this is a kid already fluent in tragedy, rehearsing loss for fun. Ballet gets folded in here too, her mother's fix for the morbid play, and it's the one ingredient the show lets be simply, uncomplicatedly good: the first time, she says, she felt strong and beautiful in her own body. A star-shaped balloon appears here for the first time, quietly establishing the show's visual shorthand for that hard-won sense of self.

Ingredient Two: The Album of Greatest Shame

She introduces this one with a joke before she tells it: "the album of greatest shame," a wink at the *Lizzie McGuire* soundtrack. What follows is a bit about a childhood wedgie, framed with the same wink, that turns into a small essay on how ordinary curiosity gets treated as catastrophe in a household built on modesty rules: panic from "sweet Mormon parents" over something that, described plainly, is nothing at all. It's a pattern the show returns to more than once. Something small and human meets a wildly disproportionate response, and the gap between the two is where the show finds its footing, and its argument.

Ingredient Three: The Import Shop

A lighter ingredient, mostly, though it's doing quieter work than it lets on. Chapman traces a lifelong fascination with French, Parisian imagery back to a childhood *Madeline*-themed dollhouse and forward to an adult trip to Paris that perhaps didn't live up to the fantasy but not according to Chapman, "the inverse of Paris Syndrome," she calls it, photographing caf  tables and half-eaten croissants instead of landmarks. Underneath the bit is a harder-edged one about performing a certain kind of quirky, twee persona (ukuleles, Beatles trivia, old films) modeled on movies like *Juno*, which she names outright, in hindsight, as "next level hell," a persona shaped less by her own taste than by "a male movie" and what it wanted a girl like her to be. That performance, the show implies without quite saying it plainly, is what an older man later found so easy to exploit.

Ingredient Four: The Fandom

With an Evanescence song playing under it, Chapman describes a full-blown Harry Potter fandom era at thirteen: a roleplay community, a crush on Alan Rickman, the actor playing a character in the franchise, encouragement from friends and strangers online. The ingredient resurfaces later in the hour, gently, almost as a comfort rather than a punchline: on suicide watch in a behavioral health hospital as an adult, she finds a copy of a Twilight book in the facility's small library and describes it as strange comfort. It's a hard beat to sit with, and the show doesn't ask you to laugh through it.

Ingredient Five: The Vagina Plague

The show's back half gets heavier, and this is where it turns. An HPV diagnosis, and the year and a half it took to get taken seriously by doctor after doctor, culminates in a scene with a Mormon physician who frames her diagnosis as consequence rather than medicine: "you were messing around with keys that are only between a husband and wife," roughly. It's the same shame logic as the wedgie bit, aged up and given real teeth. Chapman doesn't let the show sit in that scene for long, though. She pivots almost immediately into a bit built on Hedwig-and-the-Angry-Inch-style imagery, recasting the moment as an inner voice telling her to reclaim the room rather than shrink in it.

Ingredient Six: Steve Burns

The lightest ingredient in the basket, and deliberately so, a palate cleanser between two of the heaviest stretches of the hour. Chapman fumbles a starstruck run-in with Steve Burns, the original host of *Blue's Clues*, at a café, psyching herself up and then bungling the actual interaction, before posting about it online and joking that her one regret is not having sent him a nude. It closes on a mock-prayer asking that he give her one more chance. It's a small, silly ingredient, and it earns its place: the show needs a beat this weightless before it asks the audience to sit with what comes next.

Ingredient Seven: The Encounter

After her divorce, Chapman describes meeting someone at a birthday party through a friend, an encounter that escalates past what she was comfortable with and continues past her objections. The show's comic reflexes don't relieve this material so much as they mirror an earlier pattern almost exactly: the same "actually, this is really funny" deflection she used narrating a childhood shame spiral shows up again here, largely unchanged, and watching that specific pattern repeat. What follows is heavier drinking, heavier smoking, and eventually sobriety, therapy, and a stint in treatment that she credits, in a rare unguarded moment, with saving her life.

The Banshees

Before the potion gets its last chance to work, Chapman sets the comedy down long enough to name the thing the whole hour has actually been circling. She reaches for Ursula, of all people, to describe it: no matter how hard she swims, something keeps pulling her back under. She calls the voices doing the pulling her banshees, sitting at the control panel of her own life, and admits she's spent years believing whatever went wrong was hers to carry alone. It's the plainest the show ever gets, no bit to hide behind, just the diagnosis underneath every ingredient that came before it. She says, simply, that she wants to feel at home in her own body. It's the one thing every ingredient in the basket has quietly been asking for.

"Child of Light"

At the end, Chapman cranks a tiny music box playing "La Vie en Rose," mimes invisible magic sprinkled over the basket, stirs all the ingredients together, and waits. Nothing happens. Chapman crawls to the far side of the stage, sobbing. And then, "Child of Light" by Mindy Gledhill comes on. For anyone who grew up in the church, there's a decent chance this song was part of that childhood too, sung, not just heard. Using it here isn't simply fitting; it's a reclamation performed in real time.

The show's final image completes the thread first introduced during Chapman's ballet years. Over the course of the hour, the balloon becomes the show's quiet emblem of self-love and of Chapman's desire to feel at home in her own body. After the assault, it's destroyed, one of the show's simplest and most devastating stage images. Then, as "Child of Light" plays, a new star balloon emerges from beneath the bed. Chapman doesn't announce what it means or explain that she's healed. She simply takes the balloon and dances with it. It's one of the production's smartest theatrical choices: the potion hasn't erased the past. Instead, the show suggests that rebirth isn't about becoming someone new so much as finding the self that survived underneath everything else.

Closing Thoughts

In My Room takes real formal risk in its central metaphor, treating a psychiatric hospitalization and a Steve Burns meet-cute as ingredients in the same basket, and it mostly earns that risk by refusing to let any single ingredient claim more weight than the ritual structure allows it. Whether that's a feature or a liability probably depends on which story you needed the show to slow down for. But the risk underneath that risk is the more obvious one, and the one worth naming plainly: this is a deeply vulnerable hour, an artist handing an audience of strangers the actual contents of her own life and asking them to hold it gently.

It's worth saying, too, that the weight of this material was real enough that Chapman had to cancel her first scheduled weekend of performances while she prepared to take it on. I was originally set to review that first weekend. After watching the show the following weekend, I understand why. What's not in question is the room's reaction: a standing ovation, and, from where I was sitting, very few dry eyes by the time the lights came up. For a world premiere, that's a remarkable result.

More importantly, the show never offers false hope. The potion doesn't magically work, the past doesn't disappear, and she never asks the audience to believe she's been remade. Instead, *In My Room* suggests that rebirth is less like magic than memory: gathering the scattered pieces, naming them, and deciding they're still yours to keep. That's what makes the final dance with the star balloon so moving. It isn't the end of an exorcism. It's the moment after, when there's finally enough room left to live.

Show Info

Written & Performed by: Laura Elise Chapman

Festival: Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival

Recognition: Fringe Pick

Status: World Premiere

Venue: Lighttree Studios

Runtime: approx. 60 minutes, no intermission

About the Artist

Laura Elise Chapman is a Utah-born actor, writer, barista, photographer, singer, and clown who loves to spend her time goofinâ?? and making little skits. Two of her skits have won Best in Category at Great Salt Lake Fringe, which made her both blush and cry both times: *All Times, All Things, All Places* (2022) and *The Funeral Potatehoes Presents: Moments That Made Me Question Everything* (2024). Follow @laurachipchap to stay abreast of Lauraâ??s little creations.

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