

2016 Philadelphia Fringe Festival Review: 'Speculum Diaries'

By **Michael Kelly** - September 18, 2016

In the opening moments of *Speculum Diaries*, Irina Varina's self-portrait-in-motion now playing at 1fiftyOne gallery, she bashfully confesses, "This is the story of a happy girl." She adds, however, that it may be, "Hard to define." Loneliness and alienation—the elusive specters inhabiting *Speculum Diaries'* tender environs—rarely are.

Originally conceived as a three-minute living diary, *Speculum Diaries* has since blossomed into a full-length imaginative feast, documenting Irina's internal idiosyncrasies.

Pulling back the curtain in her mind for us, she reveals a woman—powerful and fragile—with a dreamy disposition, and a lust for chocolate. She playfully bounds about the small stage like an amateur ballerina. All the while casting an imposing shadow which loomed over the performance and, in a way, haunted her—the embodiment of Irina's artistic self-doubt.

Irina Varina in 'Speculum Diaries.'
Photo by David Brick.

However, *Speculum Diaries'* flirtatious dark side is tempered with ample amounts of Irina's intimate and charming pantomime. She writhes about the floor spooning the imaginary lover she longs for. She uses peanut M&Ms to reenact scenes from a book she enjoyed. She shouts through an antique speculum like a microphone. She even sings a lullaby to her vagina, that is equal parts admonishment and apology.

Speculum Diaries is in many ways like a drunken conversation between intimate friends, Irina and her audience; unedited and unashamed. It is the ruminations of a person caught between two worlds—a dream world filled with pleasure and warmth, and a real world that is all too often, absent of both.

RATING:

Running Time: 60 minutes, with no intermission.

Speculum Diaries plays September 14th at 7 pm, September 17th at 5 pm, September 19th at 6 pm, September 22nd at 7 pm, September 23rd at 6 pm, and September 24th at 2 pm at The 2016 Philadelphia Fringe Festival performing at 1fiftyOne gallery + art space – 3312 Kensington Avenue in Philadelphia, PA. For tickets, call the box office at (215) 413 1318, or purchase them [online](#).