

Love and Bureaucracy Collide in 'How to Keep an Alien'

BY JOSEPH CERMATORI

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2016 AT 11:30 A.M.



Ger Holland

The Irish writer and performer Sonya Kelly returns to New York this September with *How to Keep an Alien*, a new, autobiographical show about how she fell hard for an Australian woman named Kate just days before the latter's Irish work visa was set to expire. It's a sweet, charmingly spun tale of modern love and state bureaucracy, based on the couple's efforts to secure Kate a partner visa so they could build a life together. Eight years later, with all their immigration roadblocks now behind them, the two are planning their wedding.

The setup blends elements of traditional stand-up comedy, storytelling akin to what you might hear on *The Moth Radio Hour*, and queer solo performance in the vein of Tim Miller and Holly Hughes. With just some desks and bookcases for scenery, the production uses sound effects to create a vibrant, zany mood. But there are more reflective moments, too, as when Sonya is forced to recognize her own basic privilege in an immigration bureau full of asylum-seekers.

Onstage, Kelly, who resembles a bespectacled Samantha Bee, cuts an affably geeky figure, deftly balancing Irish wit with broad physical comedy and moments of touching sentiment. The actor Paul Curley appears alongside her in the role of her stage manager (Kelly calls it more of a "one and three-quarter person" piece than a strict solo), and he very nearly steals the show with some adorably hammy singing midway through.

How to Keep an Alien

Written and performed by Sonya Kelly

Irish Arts Center

553 West 51st Street

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Through October 1