

## Ruby Wax and Judith Owen at CoolTan Arts - review by Zoe King, CoolTan Arts



[CoolTan Arts](#) were delighted to be contacted by Ruby, offering to premier the rewrite of her show, '[Losing It](#)', at our arts centre – we'd never imagined that we'd be chosen as a venue prior to her taking on the West End. Likewise, I'm fairly sure that Ruby Wax never imagined she'd be performing on the possibly world's smallest stage, alongside cats wandering in and out of the building, and glamorous facilities such as an art room disguised as a dressing room, and a frankly terrifying Portaloo. The event was held as a fundraiser, as CoolTan urgently need to move to new premises (see my previous Portaloo point).

I wasn't sure what to expect from the show. My previous experience of Ms Wax is confined to vague memories of her going through Imelda Marcos' shoe collection and a brief appearance in Red Dwarf. I knew that she's involved in campaigning against mental health stigma, and that she'd spent time in The Priory. My immediate thoughts were that 'Losing It' was going to be either very, very good or very, very misguided. Fortunately, it turned out to be the former.

Ruby was accompanied by Judith Owen, a talented singer-songwriter, described as 'a female Randy Newman'. 'Losing It' being a two-woman show, they both have lived experience of mental distress. Combine them with the evening's audience, and I suspect that we slightly skewed the statistic of 'one in four people have/had mental health problems' for the night.



The show started with Ruby thanking various pharmaceutical companies, then Judith's shimmering music provided an smooth transition into a veritable rollercoaster of a show. Ruby's story of her life - from childhood to the present day – was frank, funny, and forthright. She covered the ups and downs; her manic highs and serious depressions, her dealing and not dealing with fame and celebrity. Her guide to marriage (the 'Negotiated Deal') and to love and hormones (neuroscience combined with cold turkey) were hysterical; her observations on being young, growing old and everything in between struck a chord with many of the audience, belly laughs being a common denominator among us.

Judith provided a perfect foil to Ruby's outgoingness – the chemistry between the two women (they are also friends in real life) was tangible, and their on-stage personas have been described as being in a co-dependent relationship; Ruby representing the manic side of bi-polar, and Judith the depression.

Nothing was taboo – mental health, psychiatric treatment (and hospitalisation), medication, self-image, celebrity, relationships and the "lack of an instruction manual for life" were all discussed openly and honestly, laced with razor-sharp wit and the odd slip of Ruby's tongue firmly into her cheek. Judith provided the perfect musical complement, along with a deadpan delivery. At the end, she held a Q&A session, and offered to see if she was free to join us on our annual [Sponsored Walk](#) on the 9<sup>th</sup> October.

In the space of an hour-and-a-bit, I laughed more than I have over the last couple of months. Far from being the intimidating characters that I'd imagined, Ruby and Judith made me and my companions feel like we were on the same level as them, giving a warm, empathetic and insightful view into their experiences. An evening of bittersweet comedy, with a serious message behind it, the show seemed to resonate with many of our own lives. Laughter being the best medicine, I'm tempted to suggest that 'Losing It' should be available on prescription from all good GPs.

'Losing It' will be touring nationally and in London's West End over the next few months, and part of ticket proceeds will be donated to [Comic Relief](#).

Additional information: CoolTan Arts is an arts mental health charity that believes mental well being is enhanced by the power of creativity. It is run by and for those with mental distress. Partly funded by Comic Relief.

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