

Review: A Very Leila Christmas

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By [Ryan McGreal](#)

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Izad Etamadi, A Very Leila Christmas

In 2013, [Izad Etamadi](#) caught our attention with his award-winning one-person play *Borderland*, a moving story about a young gay man growing up in Iran.

Last summer, Etamadi reprised one of the characters from that play to star in *Love With Leila*, a sweet and hilarious coming-of-age tale of a young Iranian woman falling in love for the first time. As Anne Bokma noted in her [enthusiastic](#)

[RTH review](#), Etamadi "inhabits her character so completely that it's easy to look past his beard."

At the end of the performance, Etamadi promised the audience that Leila would return to the stage for a Christmas story, and Leila has delivered in spades. *A Very Leila Christmas* is a delight: uproariously funny, infectiously upbeat and irresistibly compelling.

Leila immigrates to Canada, moves to an overpriced apartment on Barton Street, takes a call centre job in customer service and sets out to learn about this Christmas thing Canadians seem to love so much. She swoons over a cute man in the call centre (played under duress by a good-natured audience member), agonizes over crappy HSR service and struggles to understand the rules and mores of Christmas.

An awkward attempt to chat up her boyfriend - "he just doesn't know it yet" - ends with Leila promising to throw a Christmas party, without any idea what that entails. (As part of her research, she watches a must-see list of movies that somehow includes *Schindler's List*.)

Leila has the epiphany that the holiday is built around "the Jesus Christ of Christmas - Santa!" and much hilarity ensues. Comparing Christmas to her own religious tradition, Leila calls Ramadan "the original Hunger Games."

Etamadi inhabits Leila's character with such dedication, fluency and infectious charm that the audience can't help but be smitten with her naive self-confidence and her stumbles over the bizarre gotchas of Western culture.

It was the kind of play where the audience emerges with sore cheeks and puffy eyes from laughing so hard and so often. One of my favourite bits was Leila's musical take on The 12 Days Of Christmas, a spirited list which included such treats as seven twerking lessons and five seasons of *Real Housewives of Vancouver*.

We attended Friday's performance at a packed [Staircase Theatre](#), in which Leila was supported on stage by the talented [Two Juliets](#), who delighted Hamilton Fringe audiences last summer with their performance *XOXO: The Relationship Show* (you can read RTH reviews [here](#) and [here](#)).



Two Juliets, A Very Leila Christmas

The Juliets did a lovely job accompanying Leila on her journey, engaging the audience with songs and humour and helping steer Leila straight when she misunderstood the meaning of Christmas to tragicomic effect in the second act.

There were three performances altogether from December 17-19, and the other two nights included musical accompaniment by [Lyla Miklos](#) and Sheena Campbell, respectively.

Etamadi has more in store for Leila, and I can't encourage you strongly enough to get out and see her the next time she makes an appearance on stage.

Ryan McGreal, the editor of [Raise the Hammer](#), lives in Hamilton with his family and works as a programmer, writer and consultant. Ryan volunteers with [Hamilton Light Rail](#), a citizen group dedicated to bringing light rail transit to Hamilton. Several of his articles have been published in the [Hamilton Spectator](#). He also maintains a [personal website](#) and has been known to post passing thoughts on Twitter [@RyanMcGreal](#).