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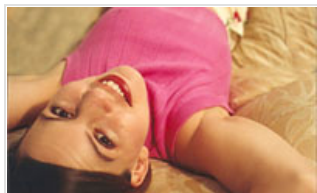
But Love is My Middle Name!



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Fringe Festival: 'But Love Is My Middle Name!' is a life story, with music

By Nelson Pressley
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Dominic Albo/Courtesy Capital Fringe Festival

Emily Love Morrison steps into the Fringe confessional with the appealingly moody "But Love Is My Middle Name!" It's the story of her life (life stories are a popular Fringe genre) with a wistful '80s soundtrack that she performs with keyboardist/guitarist Bradley Foster Smith.

The premise is that she's working out a set list for a radio show, and the theme is her romantic misadventures. Smith listens to Morrison's history, makes musical suggestions and acts the roles of several of Morrison's lost flames. And, at the right moment, they play songs together — a slowed-down take on the Pretenders' "Don't Get Me Wrong," for example, that grows torchy, and Rickie Lee Jones's plaintive, moving "A Lucky Guy."

Morrison's not a great singer, and she knows it. But she's very intuitive, with a supple feel for lyrics and, in time, an appealing atmosphere builds. She has some interesting stories about kicking around in New York and Los Angeles — Morrison has been acting and singing for a while, and she wrote a few of the wistful ballads she performs here — and her recollections are a grown-up combination of funny and poignant. The show is about learning to take the long view, which can be hard to do when you're facing heartbreak.

That's what makes the musical evening so intriguing. It's not a wholly polished 70 minutes. But Morrison rides a fine line between emotion and composure as she tells her tales; she's good company. Smith is excellent in support, sketching in characters without a lot of fuss and providing sturdy accompaniment on music that feels more than merely nostalgic. It feels lived.

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