

## Like Mother, Like Daughter feeds body and soul

By [Amy Pataki](#) Restaurant Critic  
Tues., Nov. 20, 2018



Photo by Mary Anderson

To the tricky question of what to eat before seeing a performance of *Like Mother, Like Daughter*, the answer is: Nothing.

They feed you dinner at the show.

Eating a Middle Eastern meal with the cast and audience is just one part of *Like Mother's* uniqueness, although it is on par with [Eatwith.com](http://Eatwith.com) and other dining-with-strangers experiences.

The second element is the emotional heft of witnessing real mothers and their daughters discuss their relationships unscripted.

“It can get quite raw,” says Grainne Goodwin, 64, who appears with daughter, Ruth Goodwin.

The project, which runs at 918 Bathurst Centre of Culture until Nov. 24, is set up like a game. Eight participants take turns going up in pairs or in foursomes, asking each other unrehearsed questions from index cards. The game runs about an hour, after which each participant hosts a table at dinner.

The conversations take place around a cosy wooden dining table; the audience surrounds them on four sides, including a fair smattering of fathers, sons, brothers and husbands.

Onstage, Helena Hayden shares her struggles to leave a verbally abusive marriage with her daughter Aisha Evelynna. Hima Batavia resists her mother's pressure to marry: “The second child always fights back,” responds Panna Batavia.

More comical is the lightning round between Libby Glozman-Bakouz, at 11 the youngest participant, and her mother. Offstage, Libby says the project made her realize “my mom and I have more in common than I thought.”

“We're still far apart on fashion. I'd like her to wear more bling,” says Rina Glozman, a pharmaceutical researcher from Latvia.

All the mothers are immigrants. Of the four daughters, only one speaks her mother's mother tongue. That would be Alice Cheng, 17, an international baccalaureate student at Victoria Park Collegiate Institute.

When asked by her mother Ai Ying (Nancy) Cheng what unfair expectations were placed on her as a child, Alice answers it was being told to smile more.

“You wouldn’t have asked that of a son,” says Alice, as the audience murmurs, switching to Mandarin to appease her mother.

Watching two people who love each other converse deeply is part of *Like Mother*’s appeal.

The other is the food.

At candlelit tables for eight, a vegetarian Mideast spread awaits after the show. At one table, Alice Cheng plays hostess by pouring water and ladling food.

There is hummus stained pink by beets, with pita triangles for scooping. Mujadarra is topped by darkly fried onions. Another bowl holds yogurt laced with garlic and sliced cucumbers. Mint tea comes at the end with densely delicious squares of semolina cake, golden from turmeric and sprinkled with fresh pomegranate seeds.

Sitting with strangers is like being at the singles table at a wedding. Everyone makes an effort to converse.

“If they could do that (on stage), I can do this. There’s nothing to risk here,” says audience member Ciaran Breen, who’s contemplating playing the *Like Mother* game with his parents when he visits Ireland for Christmas.

Audience member Fei Tang wanted to participate in the project, directed by Rose Plotek and cocreated by Toronto’s Why Not Theatre.

Tang is the Chengdu-born mother of two daughters, aged 14 and 11. Her husband talked her out of it.

“He warned me in one minute it could get ugly,” says Tang.

Signy Lynch, a PhD student in theatre at York University, says *Like Mother* fits in with a current theatre trend for reality. “You’re experiencing their real lives. That’s what is so exciting,” Lynch says.

Tickets to performances Nov. 22, 23 and 24 at [kofflerarts.org](http://kofflerarts.org) and [theatrewhynot.org](http://theatrewhynot.org).