

Ch Ch Changes

Venue: Citizens Theatre

Where: Glasgow

Date Reviewed: 26 October 2011

WOS Rating: ★★★★★

Scott Purvis

History has created a folklore of gay rights: the trod-upon LGBT community, marginalised and socially disenfranchised, rise up, tearing down the stone wall between them and their personal freedoms and, defiantly and proudly, pinning their rainbow colours to the mast.

So what became of the children of the revolution? What about those who were left behind in Scotland, separated from Christopher Street by the Atlantic and their country's slow-changing attitudes to homosexuality? Martin O'Connor's poignantly retrospective *Ch-Ch-Changes* seeks to channel these voices, looking at the lives of those who, now entering middle-age, find themselves in a world totally different from their childhood.

Grant Smeaton carries this excellent one-man show beautifully. One of the great chameleons of contemporary theatre, Smeaton flits between hugely different characters in a glance, finding the exuberant confidence of a newly-liberated transvestite as smoothly as the heartbroken frustration of a fifty year old slowly coming to terms with his sexuality.

His greatest talent is his perhaps his naturalism. The evening feels like a chat had across a gin and tonic or in deepest, most familiar confidence. O'Connor's characters, conversational and distinct, are brought vividly to life by Smeaton and breathe with individualism. His glances into the audience, his welcoming gestures and comfortable, effortless delivery make this one of the most intimate pieces of theatre in Glasgow this year.

This is in no small part due to O'Connor's subtly brilliant script. In just an hour and a half, he represents one hundred years of the gay rights movement, pulling together characters destroyed by social convention and galvanised by personal spirit. His writing is sharp and expansive, powered with empathy and some underlying, recognisable Glasgow banter.

Admittedly, the David Bowie connection, promoted by the production's *Hunky Dory* poster and *ch-ch-changing* title, is a bit of a red herring. Although its series of monologues is punctuated with blasts of the Thin White Duke and Aladdin Sane, the lyrics do not marry up quite as well as might be expected, and the sight of Smeaton's creations jiving and quietly crooning to Ziggy Stardust at times undermines its honesty.

Nonetheless, this is an excellent piece of conversational theatre, full of life and humour, which, socially and spiritually, strikes at the heart of contemporary gay life whilst pitifully looking back to its past.