

CH CH CHANGES @ Citizens Theatre

4/5 stars

Review by Missy Lorelei.

In *Bette Cavette*, the brilliant sell-out show of 2010, Grant Smeaton, theatre's own Swiss Army Knife, did not rely on easy caricature or impersonation, but with wig, shades stance and intonation completely transformed into sixty five year old Hollywood acid queen Bette Davis, alongside obsequious chat-show host Dick Cavette (Mark Prendergast). This time, he is flying solo but transformation is still very much the key element.

To a glorious Bowie soundtrack (Lady Grinning Soul, Queen Bitch, ohhh, yeah!) and based around real life stories, *Ch-Ch Changes* spans the LGBT decades, from pre-AIDS hedonism, through Stonewall and the personal as political, to Graham Norton as "the acceptable face" of mainstream homosexuality, featuring five characters ripping out pages of their diaries for the voyeuristic audience to savour.

Martin O' Connor's script is wonderful, finding magic in the commonplace: a woman's silk scarf left on a transvestite's pillow by his wife as a simple gesture of tacit acceptance, a scared man coming out to his teenage son, a new lover's touch as an epiphany for a jaded, middle-aged man.

Yet for all of the tender language, there is never a slipping into mawkishness – this is a defiantly unsentimental piece, itchy like the grit of glitter stuck in the eye – the gallows/Gallowgate humour sees to that. The two most successful vignettes are the flamboyant cross-dresser giving us an anecdotal tour of his dressing-up box ("Ah, here it is," he coos, "my floral Burkha!") and a husband's confrontation with his ex-wife and so – so quietly, poignantly rendered, I cried.

Damn near perfection, for pretty things of all persuasions.