

The Scotsman

JOYCE McMILLAN on REALITY at Studio@Q!, Glasgow, for The Scotsman 26.10.07

4 stars ****

FOR TWO OR THREE years, Martin O'Connor has been working as a solo artist around The Arches in Glasgow, on a series of shows exploring aspects of 21st century masculinity. Now, though - with this new one-hour show for Glasgay! 2007 - he seems to take a step forward as a writer, creating three linked monologues that look at the pathology of modern manhood from three distinctive and fascinating viewpoints.

The first piece, Fame, amounts to a brilliant high-speed tour around the delusional inner world of a Glasgow teenager obsessed with "becoming somebody" through the fickle world of reality-show celebrity. The second, War, shows a Scottish squaddie in Afghanistan gradually sliding into despair and depression as his partner back home becomes a celebrity soldier's wife, and dumps him for better things. And the third is a bleak account of a boy who is both a father and a child; a teenage Dad who can no more care properly for his endangered baby son than he can imagine any escape from the brutal world of junk jobs and video violence in which he lives.

There are only a few points in the trilogy where O'Connor's performance fully matches the quality of the writing; he needs more vocal variation, and - as he says himself, in a wry video interlude - the dispassionate eye of a good director. There's no doubting, though, that this time around, O'Connor has produced a very fine set of monologues about the emasculation of men in an age of meaningless celebrity, when effort and dedication count for nothing, and blind chance for almost everything.