

Behaviour review

Thursday 17 April 2014

Theology

Pearce Institute, Govan

Mary Brennan

Wee votive candles flicker by the doorway, more candles stand on the table carefully centred under an image of the Crucifixion as the small, all-male choir processes down the red carpet and on to the stage, and the space takes on echoes of an adhoc chapel. But if writer/director and performer Martin O'Connor is serving as the priest then, regardless of the faith of his fathers, his voice is raised in wry, gallus praise of Glasgow, and Govan in particular.

Part One of Theology is a "reinterpretation of the Catholic Mass performed in Glaswegian dialect". This allows O'Connor to inter-twine liturgy with football chant - the 10 singers give these anthems laldy - but underlying the cheeky humour, there's a vein of serious questioning. His own boyhood rituals of worship and confession are laid out, like dots that didn't join up. What did religion, regardless of what team you supported, really give Glaswegians as they tried for a better life on earth, not in heaven. Something to sing about on the terraces, perhaps?

Part Two, his mosaic-monologue, A Govan of the Mind, pushes further into this terrain of what shapes identity, culture and mindset. Is it place? family? work? football? Or the routine observations of a Sunday's worship to keep you straight, narrow and un-sinning through the week?

It's here that O'Connor's ear for patois, cadence and cliché thrives in a series of poems that catch at the remembered vibrancy of a Govan that's fallen hard on changing times.

There is unsentimental affection in the ripe, perceptive vignettes that anchor characters and behaviour patterns to the very streets outside the venue. Their flesh is made word, and the words keep faith with Glasgow.

Oliver Searle's music and Nichola Scrutton's soundscore enrich both parts of O'Connor's celebration of humanity.