

Theology

The Pearce Institute, Govan

Star rating: * * * *

JOYCE MCMILLAN

AT THE Pearce Institute, one of the large side rooms has been transformed into what looks like a modern Catholic church. There's a huge triptych of paintings of Christ crucified, Mary and Joseph; there are candles, an altar, incense.

And there is a ten-strong male choir; but the words they sing, in classic liturgical forms, are not quite what the audience – or congregation – might expect.

This is the first half of Martin O'Connor's strange and thrilling Easter show *Theology*, presented at the Pearce Institute as part of the Arches' current Behaviour Festival and as he plays the celebrant in this powerfully skewed version of a Christian mass, this brilliant young Glasgow writer and performer quietly engineers the most eloquent and moving collision between the language of religion, and the passions that play out daily on Glasgow's streets.

Some might see *Theology* as a Connolly-style send-up of the mass, as the men sing through all the nuances of an ordinary exclamation like "Oh God!". What is happening, though, is the reverse: O'Connor is exploring the deep, traditional spiritual yearnings expressed through street language, and the burning need for solace, peace and redemption that runs through the life of a scarred and sometimes traumatised community.

And in the second half of the show, alone on stage, O'Connor performs a kind of novena of his poems about Glasgow in a display of nuanced language and imagery that confirms him as a brave and significant dramatic poet in contemporary Scotland, learning from past masters like Tom Leonard, but moving things on, in a bold and memorable direction of his own.

Seen on 14.04.14