

The Mark of the Beast
Scottish Storytelling Centre
★★★★

Martin O'Connor's latest spoken-word performance offers a searingly honest look at how alcohol shapes our lives

REVIEWS / SPOKEN WORD / CORINNE KEMP | 11 MAY 2018

The Mark of the Beast is Martin O'Connor's latest spoken word show following on from his previous shows *Theology* and *Building a Nation*. Martin O'Connor's newest performance blends spoken word, song and real life accounts in Glaswegian Scots to explore Glasgow's relationship with alcohol and addiction. Supported by sound design created by Nichola Scrutton, and featuring real life accounts from members of the North East Recovery Community (NERC), O'Connor delivers an immersive look at society's and the individual's relationship with alcohol.

Opening with a fast-paced verse asking, "are ye huvin' a drink or no?", Martin O'Connor transports you straight to the pub on a Friday night. His performance is impeccable in encapsulating the fellowship of drinking together; by the end of his verse you will be left wondering if you should grab a pint. Contrasting sharply are the real voices of the NERC describing their struggles with alcohol addiction; from those who were given their first drink at just 12 years old to those who didn't touch a drop until late 30s. To forgive the obvious pun, the effect is starkly sobering. These voices add authenticity to O'Connor's verses describing the people behind his words and how alcohol can affect their whole lives.

Alcohol, the "demon drink", is under examination in this show but O'Connor contrasts this with religious overtures, evoking a sense of cult-like behaviour in how we as a society we consume alcohol and how it can consume us. Stories of forgotten travels home after one too many, drunken sing-songs and a frightening release of aggression upon a bystander examine how normalised excessive drinking has become. But despite the dark subject matter, O'Connor's delivery injects humour into the proceedings. *The Mark of the Beast* is an enthralling and captivating examination of alcohol in society that delivers truths with brutal honesty without chastising those who suffer from addiction.