Dancing Bear

at Palace Theatre

Reviewed by Katie Leicester February 2018

"The production is glamorous, hilarious and heart-breaking, deeply personal and uplifting making it a must see for all".

Contact and Jamie Fletcher & Company presented the Manchester premiere of the brand new musical Dancing Bear as part of Queer Contact Festival 2018. Dancing Bear is a celebration and exploration of the joys and struggles between faith, sexuality and gender identity.

Dancing Bear is an 80 minute show followed by a short break and then an opportunity for a question and answers section with the cast and creatives. The show is part of the Queer Contact and is also a BSL (British Sign Language) interpreted show with audio description integrated fully into its heart and its narrative. It originally previewed at Contact (Manchester) in February 2016 as part of Queer Contact Festival.

The production begins with the cast confidently introducing themselves including welcoming the audience and inviting them to be part of the production process.

Dancing Bear tells the story of a young man whose heart is caught in a struggle between his spiritual devotion and his emerging sexuality through storytelling, dance, drag performance by the extremely talented Divina De Campo (**Owen Farrow**), live music and verbatim. The show seeks to explore the issues faced by many people in the LGBTQ community – social acceptance, mental health, personal integrity and spiritual peace. Fabulous dialogue throughout the performance which stood out poignantly such as ‘Life is too serious to be taken seriously’, ‘no fear in love’, ‘love and grace to become visible’, ‘love is a verb’ and ‘Jesus was queer as f@@@’ making the words all too transparent for the underlying message ‘Love is Love and will conquer all’!

With full frontal nudity, strong language and an age rating, Dancing Bear certainly doesn’t shy away from adult content with its 10 exquisite cast each telling their own stories and journey through adolescence, discovering their sexuality and religion, and the challenges they faced including bullying, ridicule and torment.

Throughout the evening we witnessed cleverly written lyrics in fabulous songs like “The Club on the Edge of Town” and “I Believe in You”, demonstrating the talent of this amazing and slightly challenging performance, by making you think about the difficulties and the joys that the LGBTQ community face.

Jamie Fletcher, director and musician said, "What I'm trying to do with this show is open up positive conversations between Queer and Christian communities: communities that have a history of not necessarily getting along. It's a vital subject. I think it is really important as an artist that I be bold and heartfelt with the work I make, educating, inspiring and entertaining an audience as well as challenging them or moving them in some way. There are not many companies of our size making work at this scale explicitly about Queerness, Sexuality and Gender Identity, and even fewer that are trying to integrate BSL so it's an integral part of a theatre show. I am very excited about what we are trying to achieve and about sharing it with our Manchester audiences."

Credits must go to: Direction and Concept Writer - Jamie Fletcher, Writer – Beccy Owen, Dramaturg – Emma Adams, Choreography by Eleni Edipidi, Musical Direction by Ric Neale, Set and costume, Lighting Designer – Tim Skelly, Sound Engineer – Craig Rothery and Stage Manager – Charlie Stanley for making this production what it is a spectacular piece of art through storytelling of religion and sexuality, and the impact it has on individuals through troubles and triumphs.

Well done to all involved.