

Review: The Will to Be at the Bakehouse Theatre

Review By Lia Cocks – Theatre Travels



I've always had a soft spot for The Bakehouse Theatre, having performed there myself many years ago. It is a casual, intimate space, perfect for the one man play, *The Will To Be*.

Written, produced and performed by an incredibly creative and talented young man, Mark Salvestro, *The Will To Be* is a thought provoking, one act exploration of sexuality, societal suppressions and shame laced with the words of Shakespeare.

We first meet the character, William O'Halloran, sitting atop his desk reading a letter to himself as we take our seats in the studio theatre. The eloquent, historical set implies this is the office of an intellect; with books, certificates and work scattered across the room. A carefully placed coat rack with jacket and hat strategically placed, and a melancholy late 50s early 60s soundtrack playing in the background.

Salvestro articulates the nervousness, flustered and overwrought O'Halloran with such a befitting authenticity of someone dealing with an indecent homosexual discretion being discovered in the 1960s. He tells us he has been fired one month before finishing his 10 year lectureship, as his Professor, and the luminary who hired him in the first place, had discovered this illegal relationship. In the process of O'Halloran describing his student Henry Rosebury; with his green eyes, dark hair, sharp cheekbones, we understand the desire he has for this student is more than just lust. As we progress, his affections are described in more sordid, languid details, which had me almost blushing in my seat, but I was so involved in the love story, that I felt this was a necessary part in the storytelling. We are then introduced to Lola...O'Halloran's wife. Taken back to their meeting in 1955, when they were both students and set up by O'Halloran's brother, the way he physically describes Lola is the exact same way he described Henry. A telling moment. Lola was his equal; both intellectually, and emotionally. But he felt he was not capable of real love with her. He descends into self-pity; saying he is undeserving of Professor Lawrence, Lola or even Henry and begins to blame his military Irish/Catholic father. Passages which stuck in my mind are 'conscience makes cowards of us all' and 'master of others words but illiterate of his own' As he comes out to Lola in the most poetic way, and turns down Henry's offer to join him in London, we see O'Halloran become the epitome of love, truth and freedom.

Peppered with fabulous songs of the era, an accurate historic set, and a commanding and compelling leading man, ***The Will To Be* is an exceptional must see piece of theatre.**