



Pleasance Times

Sweet Clarity: Trans Scripts

By Alec Woolford



Credit: Anna Bruce, Pleasance Picture Show

"Wow, this is not gonna be easy," says a character early on in Paul Lucas' new verbatim play, *Trans Scripts*. It's a tremendous understatement. Drawing from over three hundred hours worth of interviews with transgender men and women, *Trans Scripts* relays the experiences of dozens of different transgender women through the voice of six transgendered performers.

It is important to remember that "this is not gonna be easy" is not the same as "this is going to be terrible." One of the triumphs of *Trans Scripts* is that it doesn't rely on a singular voice or a linear narrative. Of course *Trans Scripts* contains tales of rejection, but these are mingled with tales of success and joy. The play's dynamic springs from it's exposition of the contrasts (and conflicts) within the transgender community.

One common misconception, which is slowly shifting, is that every transgendered person lives in a sustained kind of personal crisis. When I spoke to the cast, Bianca Leigh (Tatania) was keen to dispel the perception of the transgendered individual as an outcast. "A lot of us have very close relationships with our families. There's this idea of 'oh those poor people, their lives are so tragic and sad'. There's so many of us that are quite happy".

Another forgivable misconception is to believe that each transgendered person goes through the same process to assign their gender identity. The process of "coming out" as transgender is an entirely different experience to that of coming out as homosexual. Moreover, there is a great deal of confusion over what being transgender actually means. Bianca suggested that the transgender community is "actually one of the most diverse communities. We have a rather fractious community because we can't even agree on what a transsexual is, or even to use the word transsexual." Though the six characters in the play are supportive and generous with one another, they differ passionately on their opinions over how to define their gender. It's a refreshingly honest explanation of a complex issue.

The reason for this difference in interpretation partially stems from a generational gap. The experience of coming out as transgender has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Historically, conforming to a traditional, successful narrative was essential in order to be allowed treatment. The playwright, Paul Lucas explained that for a long time, "unless you told the same story as everybody else who got treatment, you would not get treatment. So they would just tell the same story. There were a couple of generations where trans people were robbed of their own narrative".

Exposing these untold stories is part of the reason why *Trans Scripts* is such a compelling experience. There is an urgency in the way these stories are told - it is cathartic not only for the cast, but also for the audience. Recent events like the release of the trailer for the new film *Stonewall* have drawn accusations of whitewashing the gay rights movement and removing the pioneering role of the transgendered community. *Trans Scripts* focuses specifically on the more unconventional stories which are frequently left out of contemporary discussions.

Though contemporary figureheads like Caitlyn Jenner and Laverne Cox have helped to move transgender issues into the mainstream, they aren't necessarily representative of the entire transgender community. They are a minority within a minority, privileged through no fault of their own by a wealth and status which isn't available to the majority of transgender people. "I haven't got \$20,000," exclaims one character in the play, when she is struggling to find an adequate plastic surgeon. Though *Trans Scripts* is hardly an exhaustive account of the transgender experience, the impression given is one of truthfulness, one which digs beneath the common misconceptions and generalisations surrounding the community.

At the end of each performance, the audience are invited to join the cast for a drink at the Pleasance's real ale bar, to ask questions and to discuss the show. It's a clear extension of the play's mission to start a conversation. *Trans Scripts* takes the transgender community as it is, and presents it to the audience with an engaging and unflinching clarity.

Trans Scripts, Upstairs, 15.00 (90 minutes)