



Madonna and Child and Other Divas

Written by Tom Johnson
Directed by Julie Hamburg
The Cherry Lane Theatre
38 Commerce Street
www.fringenyc.org

Review by Scott Harrah

Tom Johnson crams everything shocking and controversial about homosexuality and fundamentalist Christians into *Madonna and Child and Other Divas*, a **well-acted** but unfocused and often confusing one-act drama from the 2007 New York International Fringe Festival. The story, which moves back and forth from the 1960s to the present day, focuses on David (Joe Pidsenski), a closeted gay man who meets a wholesome girl named Marilee (Kay Wilson). The two form a bond when they learn that they both attended the same Baptist college in Oklahoma, but Marilee is emotionally shattered when David confesses to her his secret “sinful” attraction to other men.

Much of the dialogue contains the usual fire-and-brimstone nonsense that fundamentalist Christians often use to justify homophobia, such as long quoted passages from the Book of Leviticus. David has dealt with homophobia all his life, from his childhood in New Mexico where his father called him a “faggot” to his adult life in which he works at a local Baptist church in Colorado. He soon begins an illicit affair with another married man at the church, creating havoc in both of their personal lives as they try to hide the truth from their wives.

Madonna is most notable for its performers, who aptly take on numerous roles. Standouts include Dan Via as a cowboy and a preacher, Samantha Desz as a mother, a dominatrix and a cowgirl, and Craig Fitzpatrick as a pastor, a gay-disco muscle stud, Marilee’s dad and a masochist. Pindelski and Wilson are consistently strong, adding depth and believability to David and Marilee. But despite the **often-extraordinary acting and genuinely touching and thought-provoking moments**, it is often difficult to decipher what is going on. **Christopher Illing effectively plays the roles of a waiter and a strung-out crystal meth addict and alcoholic**, supposedly in the present day, but we really don’t know what purpose the playwright has in mind with the substance-abusing character. Is he supposed to be David’s alter ego? His son later in life? It is never made quite clear, and this simply clouds the narrative and makes the story impossible to follow. There are also numerous dance sequences featuring old Madonna songs — all silly and fun — but they add absolutely nothing to the story and end up adding more confusion to an already confusing show.