

After the House Lights

What's On?

The Pink Unicorn fosters intergenerational dialogue

jennamarynowski on February 21, 2015 / 3 comments



Louise Lambert in *The Pink Unicorn*.

Photo credit: Ian Jackson of EPIC

Photography

Trisha Lee lives in a pink and blue world. Anyone born with a penis is a boy. They chase girls and get into trouble, and all of their behaviour can be explained by the phrase 'boys will be boys'.

And anyone born with a vagina is a girl. They wear pink, frilly dresses and love flowers and unicorns and have crushes on boys. They are god-fearing people who get married and love one man for their entire life and have a perfect daughter and live in a house with a perfect lawn and a white picket fence. And that's just the way it is.

At least, it is until Trisha's daughter, Jolene, announces she's genderqueer and wants to be addressed as Jo from now on. Which sends Trisha (played by Louise Lambert) into a spiral of furtive Wikipedia searches, reading her bible and asking pointed questions she hopes will put

Jo into a category that she understands. Do you like boys? Do you like girls? You've been a girl all your life, how can you just announce you're not one anymore? Not hearing answers she understands, Trisha supports her child as they navigate life in a small town in Texas as a genderqueer teenager and a mother with a lot of questions.

This is the journey *Northern Light Theatre* takes us through in their second show of the season, *The Pink Unicorn*, playing at the PCL Studio in the ATB Arts Barns until February 28.

I love everything about Elise Forier Edie's script and the way one-woman powerhouse Louise Lambert performed it. Set in a small town in Texas, it would have been easy to write a play with a character that was awash in stereotypes and unchallenging. We know the stereotypes all too well: the importance of everything appearing to be perfect, the southern genteel way of serving up criticism as backhanded compliments, the god-fearing strong-headed Christians, the gossip that's told behind white gloves with an air of shameful delight... the list goes on. But *The Pink Unicorn* is none of those things. The more we get to know Trisha Lee, the more of a delightfully complex of a character she becomes.

Recently in Edmonton we've been seeing – on stage and off – people who don't understand what it means to identify as a **LGBTQ** person and the consequences that lack of understanding has. What's interesting about what *The Pink Unicorn* throws into the mix is a balanced, multidimensional parental perspective. In many other plays the parents of the LGBTQ character don't accept their child's identity and become one of the antagonists their child must face. While that antagonism is part of some people's experience, *The Pink Unicorn* allows us more insight into those parents' frames of minds. In the same way we need plays that are honest to the experience of LGBTQ people, we also need plays like *The Pink Unicorn* that present multifaceted ancillary characters in their lives.

Throughout the play, Trisha constantly surprises us. She confesses she just can't understand the experiences that have led Jo to identify as genderqueer, yet she ferociously supports and defends that identity to the townsfolk. Trisha dresses in clothing that is excessively stereotypically feminine, yet enthusiastically tailors a men's blazer to fit Jo, who formerly willingly wore frilly dresses. She believes in a Christian God and is an active church-goer, but without thinking, she brazenly questions her pastor. Trisha doesn't fall into

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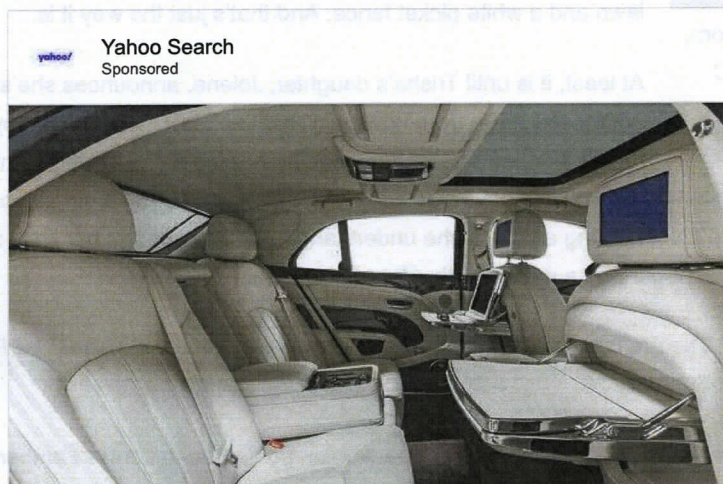
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didn't have the array of information and exposure to opinions and ideas that today's youth have access to. Maybe they didn't know that things they were doing or feeling weren't wrong, and that it is okay not to neatly into one end or the other of the gender continuum. And maybe they're scared of what opening their minds up might mean for themselves and the world they've constructed. In presenting Trisha's experiences, beliefs and doubts in a way that feels genuine, *The Pink Unicorn* opens the door for dialogue between generations about acceptance, not just of non-binary gender identities, but of anything "different".

Louise Lambert does an excellent job of playing Trisha, with the perfect mix of a slightly fallen southern belle and protective mamma bear. At 90 minutes, the show clips along but Louise never makes it feel rushed. *The Pink Unicorn* has a bit of a weird story structure – there's no real pin-drop climax of the story. The conflict is inherent within the story and we never reach the precipice of the ledge between the old norm and the time where everything has changed, but Louise keeps us hooked.

Finally, a quick mention to Trevor Schmidt's wonderful set design: with its flowery pink patchwork quilt hills and white picket fences stretching into the background, it was the perfect backdrop for the story of a woman whose world has gone from black and white (er, pink and blue?) to a whole spectrum of colours.

The Pink Unicorn runs in the PCL Studio at the ATB Arts Barns until February 28. Tickets are \$28.30 – \$30.40 through [Fringe Theatre Adventures](#). February 24 is two-for-one Tuesday and there is a post-show talk-back on February 25 and a post-show salon on February 26. All shows are at 7:30 p.m. and there is an 11:30 booty call performance on Friday, February 27.



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The Pink Unicorn

Trevor Schmidt

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