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Dublin Theatre Festival 2014 – Sinning for the truth

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Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner
Untitled Projects

Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner

Rating: ★★★★★

The late 1980's are often considered as a golden age for Scottish theatre. In the midst of this creative outpouring an enfant terrible emerged, enjoying a meteoric rise before disappearing completely. He set out to direct six shows based on episodes from the cult, Scottish novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, written in 1824 by James Hogg, but disappeared the morning of the final show. Like a resurrected Artaud railing against the establishment, he was considered a madman, a genius, an extremist and a fake. And today hardly anyone remembers him. His name was Paul Bright.

Actor George Anton, who starred in three of Bright's productions, had also forgotten his friend and mentor for twenty years until a box arrived from Brussels with a tape, a letter and some archival material from Bright upon his death in 2010. The shock prompted Anton to remember and re-

evaluate their wild nights and halcyon days and the result is *Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, an intriguing and engaging production that is part exhibition, neatly placed in the foyer of the Peacock, part documentary, part biography and part performance.

In *Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, narrative moves freely between the past and present. Anton's tale begins in 1987 when, fresh from drama school in London, he first encounters the wild eyed Bright who is about to produce the second episode of his six part, adaption of Hogg's, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Infected by Bright's wild exuberance, Anton abandons London for Glasgow and over the next two years becomes captain to Bright's Columbus, setting out into uncharted waters together, driven by Bright's unassailable conviction that there's something out there. Fueled by youthful self-belief, a DIY spirit and a reckless confidence, they hit the highs, with critical acclaim for their site specific production on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, and experience the lows with a critical mauling for their nine hour production at the Queens Hall, Edinburgh during the 1989 Fringe Festival. As Anton's star begins to rise, he is offered a role in an ITV mini-series. Meanwhile Bright's star is beginning to wane, with people refusing to work with him or tolerate his increasingly abusive and manipulative behaviour. Including Anton, who parts company with his friend and mentor, never to see him again.

Directed by Stewart Laing and written by Pamela Carter, *Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is played out on a simple set comprised of a table, chair and a box. Assisted by an onstage technician, Anton regales the audiences with stories and anecdotes, reflections and observations with engaging confidence and charm. In between, snippets of interviews from Bright's contemporaries along with footage from Bright's productions are projected onto a large, white screen. Gradually a picture emerges of Bright, of the tragic event that may have made him the man he was, of his wild obsession with art, life, love and chaos, of wanting to create theatre that made the audience invested and connected rather than passive observers, of his self-righteous disregard for the ideas and feelings of others. Interspersed are reflections on acting, the intense and transitory nature of the friendships made by people working in theatre along with brief details from Anton's own life since 1990.

Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner could equally and, perhaps more aptly, be called George Anton Confessions of a Justified Sinner, for behind Bright's story hides the story of Anton himself. Justified in walking away from the chaotic Bright to embrace new, richer possibilities, the question arises might Anton have committed the cardinal sin of turning his back on art and friendship in doing so? Would Bright still have made theatre had Anton remained?

Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner raises as many questions as it attempts to answer. When Anton, as his final act, cedes the stage to Bright, the questions multiply and Bright remains as enigmatic as ever. Perhaps Bright was guilty of the sin of self-indulgence, or perhaps sinning is as near to the truth as he could get. Whatever the answer, we laugh, are moved and provoked to question by this thoughtful and deeply engaging production.

Paul Bright's Confessions of a Justified Sinner, produced by Untitled Projects runs as part of The [Dublin Theatre Festival](#) at The Abbey Theatre the Peacock Stage, until Saturday, October 11th Doors open 8.00 p.m. Matinees on Saturday at 2.30 p.m.

Tickets: €18.00 to €25.00

For more information go to <https://www.dublintheatrefestival.com>

Alternatively go to <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/>



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