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Dispatches from The Fringe - Blue Teapot's Sanctuary conquers all

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Sanctuary
Blue Teapot

Sanctuary by Blue Teapot Theatre Company

Rating: ★★★★★

In Blue Teapot's ground breaking *Sanctuary*, a love that dares not speak its name is finally given voice in a thoughtful, touching, joyous celebration of what it means to be human. This is the love two intellectually disabled (ID) people share for one another. In a heart warming and often hilarious exploration of the joys, fears, shames and jealousies of two people in love, *Sanctuary* gives voice to the lack of freedom, the lack of privacy, the lack of knowledge and lack of support that afflicts those designated intellectually disabled. In a world where it is illegal for people with ID to have consenting sex outside of marriage, *Sanctuary* asks some difficult questions whilst celebrating the humanity and humor of the people who inspired it.

At a day out at the cinema, Larry and Sophie, with the assistance of Tom, their carer, abscond from

the rest of their group to a hotel room. There they hope to get to know one another better. Back at the cinema the others are growing restless, particularly the hot-blooded Andrew, who has a soft spot for Sophie. William, Matthew and Alice are content to watch the movie and the vain attempts of Peter to fend off the flirtatious advances of the unrelenting Sandy. But Andrew is having none of it. Hilarity ensues, culminating in Andrew leading most of the others in pursuit, leaving Peter alone to tackle the unstoppable Sandy. Back at the hotel, Tom questions the wisdom of his actions as Larry begins asking difficult questions. Humor touched with earnestness follows as the two star-crossed lovers negotiate romance, sexual desire and their budding relationship in the temporary sanctuary of their hotel room.

Sanctuary brings together theatre's holy trinity: great cast, great script and great director. Blue Teapots extraordinary ensemble, which included actors with ID, gave a sterling performance. Patrick Becker as the hot headed Andrew, Frank Butcher as the dead pan William, Paul Connolly as the Jason Stratham loving Matthew along with Robert Doherty as the conflicted carer Tom were utterly compelling. Valerie Egan as the quietly spoken Alice, Michael Hayes as the sensitive Peter and Emer Macken as the not to be dissuaded Sandy were also compelling. As too were Kieran Coppinger as "loverman" Larry and Charlene Kelly as the passionate Sophie, the star-crossed lovers snatching a few stolen moments to live out what others do everyday.

In Christian O'Reilly's well crafted and deceptively simple story, life is loud and hearts are large in a world where information is gleaned from soaps and movies, little is known of sex and love may yet blossom against overwhelming odds. O'Reilly's deeply moving and hilarious script is never patronizing, never didactic and never shirks from exposing the darker issues surrounding those with ID without ever letting them define them.

Petal Pilley's exceptional direction is the final jewel in this extraordinary crown. Utilizing the notoriously demanding Meisner technique, Pilley elicited incredible performances from her amazing cast. Renowned for his use of repetition, for imposing incredibly high stakes and choices, for pushing performers to dig deep in their search for emotional honesty, Sanford Meisner's exercises, such as the infamous Pinch and Ouch, don't allow for anything other than raw, honest truth on stage. Pilley ensures truth and honesty permeate all aspects of *Sanctuary* right down to the smallest, intimate attentions. The hurt behind public teasing, the jealousies of the lovelorn and the tenderness behind how to make a cup of tea for someone with a tremor are all beautifully rendered. In the final scene the stakes couldn't be higher as a potentially heartbreaking yet incredibly uplifting choice has to be made.

In its simple, timeless tale of two star-crossed lovers, *Sanctuary* celebrates the lives, loves and dreams of those marginalized by ID in a heart rending, heart warming production. *Sanctuary* shows a flawed and wondrous humanity striving to articulate itself, to find its place and to be as authentic as it can be. In doing so it serves as a mirror, casting our own reflections back upon us, asking us difficult questions at times but always reminding us that life is a shared experience.

Sanctuary played at the Axis Theatre as part of The Dublin Fringe Festival. For more information on *Sanctuary* click on the following link

<http://www.bluteapot.ie>



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