



Priscilla Queen of the Desert
at Altrincham Garrick Playhouse
Reviewed by Katie Leicester, May 2018

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The beautiful renovated Altrincham Garrick Theatre hosted the flamboyant musical **Priscilla Queen of the Desert**, a particularly risquÃ© script for the locals full of glitz, glamour, glitter and sexual connotations.

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Directed by the talented **Joseph Meighan**, a young producer who seems to turn everything he touches into gold, this may have been an amateur show, but make no mistake there is absolutely nothing amateur about this production and I certainly was not prepared for the magnificent ingenious masterpiece I was about to witness.

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The story follows a trio of professional drag queens, unlikely friends thrown together by circumstance, who all want to get out of Sydney for a short while for various reasons. All three jump at the opportunity offered by the sensitive drag performer Tick aka Mitzi (**Todd Bennett**), who wants to take a month out of the hectic club scene in the city to perform at a casino in Alice Springs, after he receives an invitation from his most sympathetic wife in order to finally meet his young son Benji (

Dylan Williams

). Flamboyant and spoilt Adam aka Felicia (

Rhys Nuttall

) convinces her wealthy mother, on the pretence that he might find a nice country girl, into buying them a broken down old bus they name "Priscilla"™ and they take off across the outback for an adventure, with the last addition to the trio being ageing transsexual Bernadette (

Mark Butt

), who has just lost her beloved young husband "Trumpet"™.

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I™d anticipated the set design being a real challenge for this smaller production as a large part of the story takes place in a bus and there are several location changes. This could have made the action cramped or claustrophobic but designer **Trevor McKie** did a fantastic job with (I™ve no doubt) a fraction of the budget of a West End production. The bus rotated easily enabling the cast to manoeuvre it to give the audience different perspectives, allowing the performers to make full use of the space, and was a true focal point of the show with its beautiful LED lights that transformed the "drab"™ bus into a "drag"™ bus.

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The songs consisted entirely of jukebox oldies mostly from the 1980s club days, such as 'It's raining men', 'Don't leave me this way', 'I will survive', 'Girls just wanna have fun' and many more classics, all of them quite familiar to a varied generation of listeners.

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As a trio they worked fantastically well together delivering some genuinely tender moments in among the crude jokes and outrageous performances. Their version of 'True Colours' in particular deserves a special mention, each scene the crew delivered a high energy performance as they danced to the disco classic with their outlandish routines (credit to Choreographer **Louise Pettitt**) and costumes. One minute the ensemble are dressed as cupcakes and sweet treats, the next they were dancing around as paintbrushes or gyrating against each other wearing next to nothing - this is not a show for the faint-hearted. Credit also must be given to the wardrobe team for their outstanding array of breath-taking dazzling delightful costumes that oozed seductiveness and colour.

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All be it there were plenty of frocks and feathers on the stage there was also plenty of sincerity and grit brought to proceedings when the three friends face a comedy of errors, encountering a number of strange characters as well as incidents of homophobia where they realise 'they're not in Kansas' and will have to face lots of difficulties on their way to let Felicia be a 'cock in a frock on a rock' and for Tick and Bernadette to perform in the casino.

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Bernadette's character is full of love and warmth and while she still faces conflict she does so with integrity and respect. Butt's interpretation was a treasure to watch and he created one

of the most believable performances you could see on any stage, full of tenderness. But the showstopper was the role of Adam, the fabulously bitchy Felicia who carried his roles with ease giving a note-perfect performance and delivering killer lines which had the audience in stitches. Nuttall's performance was beyond camp, and his stunningly fantastic physique and stage presence had the audience captivated and mesmerised as he strutted his stuff and owned the stage. His delivery of "Sempre Libra" was exceptional as he danced and lip synced along you couldn't help but feel you were witnessing a star in the making, and I would certainly pay West End/Broadway money to see this magnificently talented actor again.

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A definite 5 star production that would give any high budget performance a run for their money, huge credit to all involved in this production of Priscilla and it seems that Joseph Meighan has struck gold yet again.