

# ETCETERA THEATRE

## ROUNDHOUSE

# 'It's not safe for us to be who we actually are'

Kentish Town's Scottie talks to **ZOE PASKETT** about what it means to be queer in 2016

**H**e might be famous for throwing cake at Rihanna, but Queen's Crescent born artist Scottie has more on his mind.

"Since Brexit, there has been an increase of 147 per cent in reported homophobic hate crimes," he says.

Last week, David Cameron was given the honour of Ally of the Year at the Pink News awards, a decision that was lauded by many politicians including Jeremy Corbyn, but sparked outrage in the LGBT community.

Scottie describes him as a "poster boy" for an initiative he didn't start.

"I think the great untold story here," says Scottie, "is that people are forgetting that the Conservatives were responsible for putting forward Section 28, which stopped the 'promotion' of homosexuality by anyone who worked for the government, including teachers.

"It meant throughout my schooling I had nowhere to look for LGBT history or advice because people who worked in public funded positions could lose their jobs and livelihood if they promoted



homosexuality. And this wasn't that long ago."

Scottie acknowledges that progress has been made but questions whether or not this progress can actually be seen in practice.

"We can have a husband, we can have a wife, we can have a legal partner; but can we hold their hand? Yes, we do have legislation on our side but do we have the country on our side? Can I hold my partner's hand and that not be a massive statement. No, I can't. We don't live the same lives.

"We might have the same rights on



■ Scottie (left) and Lasana Shabazz.

Pictures: CHRISTA HOLKA

paper but we don't have them in action."

Scottie's directorial debut for the Roundhouse is an exploration of what it means to be queer in 2016. Having travelled the country interviewing members of the LGBT community about their opinions on mainstream politics, the associate artist has compressed it into a performance by artists channelling the voices of these people.

Putting Words in Your Mouth, which is lip-synched by cast members including Lasana Shabazz and Travis Alabanza, opens on November 22.

"They're not employed as actors, they're hired as artists, so their thoughts are in this as well," says Scottie. "I've spoken about myself for two and a half years; now let's let other people talk. I think bringing people in who haven't

performed at the Roundhouse before is a good thing to do."

"I've always known about the Roundhouse being from the area," says Shabazz. "I went to Hampstead School, so this is my home!"

Shabazz knew he was gay from a very early age, and bore the brunt of the prejudice that accompanied it throughout his school years.

"My parents always taught me: be yourself and be what you want to be, which is what I did until I realised that being the way I was in school wasn't accepted.

"I remember one of my teachers was gay and how the kids treated him and I thought 'I can't be myself'. I became very introverted and it wasn't until sixth form that I thought 'f\*\*k it' and became the person that I am now!"

He recalls the damaging effect that the words of his peers had on him as he was growing up, saying that one person's joke can stay with you for years.

"When I would hear the word 'f\*\*got', even if it wasn't aimed at me, it felt like a dagger. I thought: are they coming for me?"

"I and so many of the cast members have had to police our lives and gender and identities because it's not safe for us to be the people we actually are," says Scottie. "Queer people are more than twice as likely to commit suicide or self harm, so that is why we've got to have these conversations."

■ **Putting Words in Your Mouth runs at the Roundhouse from November 22 to December 3. Tickets are £15 pounds from [roundhouse.org.uk](http://roundhouse.org.uk)**

## REVIEW

# At worst, a Kushner seminar but engaging

**THE INTELLIGENT HOMOSEXUAL'S GUIDE TO CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM WITH A KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES**  
HAMPSTEAD THEATRE

★★★★☆

At three and a half hours, and with a title that won't fit on a ticket, Tony Kushner's latest is a daunting prospect: a sprawling epic tackling everything from socialism and belief systems to cultural heritage and sexuality via one Italian-American family.

Former union activist and staunch Communist Gus is disillusioned by an unchanging world. He plans to sell their Brooklyn brownstone while the market's favourable (the play's set in 2007, offering economic gallows humour) and then take his own

life. His adult children have their own dramas: daughter Empty's lesbian partner is pregnant via her brother V, while other brother Pill is cheating on his husband with a rent boy. There's an entire series' worth of soap opera plots bubbling around the edges of ferocious intellectual debate.

At best, that results in electrifying polyphonic arguments, with the family talking over one another at an almost incomprehensible rate; at worst, the drama stalls for another Kushner seminar on Marxist dialectic, Horace, Christian science or George Bernard Shaw - the latter referenced by the play, along with Miller and Chekhov.

Michael Boyd's sure production occasionally bows under the

weight of lengthily explored ideas.

The cast keeps us engaged, particularly David Calder as a belligerent but vulnerable Gus, and Tamsin Greig as sharp labour lawyer Empty - their close but fractious relationship the most effectively integrated with political theory. There's good support from Richard Clothier's self-loathing Pill, Luke Newberry's millennial hustler and a scene-stealing Sara Kestelman as deadpan aunt Clio.

Tom Piper's revolving set offers a deconstructed dollhouse - both grand and claustrophobic. If more dramatised conversation than consistently gripping theatre, it's still teeming with ideas and excellently performed.

Marianka Swain



■ Tamsin Greig  
Picture: MANUEL HARLAN