

12thNight.ca

Liz Nicholls on theatre

"Is it possible I just like sex?" Slut, at Northern Light Theatre: a review

Posted on [April 8, 2018](#)



Michelle Todd in Slut, Northern Light Theatre. Photo by Epic Photography.

By Liz Nicholls, [12thnight.ca](#)

S. L. U. T. The funniest set design of the season — and the only one (to my knowledge) that actually engages in smart-ass repartee with the character onstage — is to be found in the Northern Light Theatre season finale.

The outsized letters, 10 or 12 feet high and defined in flashing lightbulbs, spell out the ultimate deal-sealing class-dismissed upstaging putdown. SLUT. They glow; they flash on and off, separately and (in periodic displays of collective moral solidarity) together, in the production of Brenda McFarlane's solo comedy *Slut* directed and designed by Trevor Schmidt.

The insist on having the last word; hell, they *are* the last word. Sometimes, the character we meet sits balefully on the U like a swing, or retreats to the L. Sometimes she phones from the T.



Michelle Todd in *Slut*, Northern Light Theatre. Photo by Epic Photography.

You've heard the term "the male gaze." SLUT is "the social gaze." It's on Matilda J. McHartle (Michelle Todd), who arrives onstage, hair bouncing in indignation, all in white — in a satin-and-lace corset get-up with stiletto boots — like a big beautiful disgruntled meringue.

Matilda is an accountant who, she assures us, does own glasses and flat black shoes. And, much to her exasperated incredulity she's been arrested — for indecency and running "a common bawdy house." How could this happen?

Dander up and nearly squealing with outrage, Matilda is happy to tell us how she's been framed by her senior citizen high-rise neighbours in revenge for complaining about their garbage and their loud polka party music. ABBA pushes her over the edge. Her nemesis is an ancient widow who, as bad luck would have it, was an ex-*National Geographic Magazine* wildlife photographer with a specialty in night shots. So there's documentary evidence of our heroine having sex on the hood of her

car. With a variety of guys.

Matilda has lovers (lots of them), not clients. She's an unattached woman who enjoys sex and is generous-minded about sharing that enjoyment widely. She isn't a madam. Or a prostitute. She's not a nymphomaniac or "troubled" or out-and-out mentally ill. Ergo she must be a ... SLUT.

That's the sharp-eyed premise, a barbed satirical commentary on our hypocrisy about, and resistance to, liberated female sexuality. Matilda, a wide-eyed Candide in the field of social attitudes apparently, discovers it in the course of the play in which she channels all the characters in her story. Matilda's stage partner, the light-up SLUT sign, steps brazenly up to it and undermines her confidence.

There's a cartoon gallery of characters on display in *Slut*, all channelled by Todd as Matilda. We meet a cop, Detective Bruce, more of a dramatic convenience than a character. His view that males are predatory animals and women are the prey has led to a completely fallow celibate period: he's waiting for love before he gets laid. There's the purse-lipped old widow. There's a sex addiction counsellor, a snazzy call girl, a ditzzy girlfriend. And Todd, an eminently likeable performer, has fun with the voices.

But the play has a tendency to repeat and explain itself in thudding add-ons where it might profitably let its one-liners land lightly, for our perusal. In amassing the evidence, for example, Detective Bruce comes to a photo of an

ex- roommate that Matilda rejects in high dudgeon. "He's like 22 years old! What do you think I am? Oh right, a prostitute. Because a woman can't have a few different lovers and not be a whore, right?"

Or this: "They put me in a holding cell with a bunch of women who look like hookers to me. O right. They think I'm one too."

The character we meet in Todd's performance, child-like and blithely innocent, and pitched high toward wide-eyed incredulity and fury, just doesn't seem likely to say "maybe false bravado would work better than lame confusion."

But having said that, I must add that *Slut*, which premiered at the Toronto Fringe in 2000, long before the #MeToo reveals of our time, is amusing in its premise and refreshing in its insights. It's not about women as victims of male predation. It's not about sexual aggression or cynical calculation. It's about our collective resistance to the idea of female sexual pleasure, outside relationship commitment. Matilda lives it, is coerced into having doubts about it, and rises again.

And you want to cheer her on.

REVIEW

Slut

Theatre: Northern Light

Written by: Brenda McFarlane

Directed by: Trevor Schmidt

Starring: Michelle Todd

Where: PCL Studio Theatre, ATB Financial Arts Barns, 10330 104 St.

Running: through April 14

Tickets: 780-471-1040, northernlighttheatre.com

Share the story!



This entry was posted in [Reviews](#) and tagged [12thnight.ca](#), [Brenda McFarlane](#), [Edmonton theatre](#), [Michelle Todd](#), [Northern Light Theatre](#), [PCL Studio Theatre](#), [Trevor Schmidt](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).