

Panti Bliss: The Queen of Ireland

KNEEL BEFORE YOUR QUEEN! "The Queen of Ireland" is a monumental success.

The documentary opens with a truly honest exploration of how a young boy from Ballinrobe, County Mayo becomes a (drag) Queen. Rory gives an honest account of feeling stifled in his small town and how, once he left, he, almost accidentally, fell into becoming Panti.

The movie is spliced with home videos, fan videos and professional filming which allows the audience to walk with Rory as he recounts his colourful life. It has that distinctly Irish family feel as we listen to Rory's parents recount their own experiences which perfectly juxtapose Rory's account of the infamous anal beads incident. Tears of mirth quickly becomes tears of sympathy as Rory accounts his HIV diagnosis and we see a more serious side to him. The beauty of this documentary is that it somehow manages to break you and uplift you all at the same time.

The movie also covers the run up to the Equal Marriage Referendum in Ireland in 2015. This is possibly the most poignant part of the documentary – the sheer volume of love and relief depicted at this point of the movie is humbling. The utter joy of equality is fully realised in the cinematography at this point in the movie; Conor Horgan effortlessly weaves in the landmark results, the after parties and the love that radiated from Dublin on the 23rd of May 2015 through his choice of video imagery.

The circularity of the documentary is also particularly heart-warming; whilst the movie opens with Rory's account of feeling like a very big fish in a rather small pond, at the end of the documentary he returns to Ballinrobe to perform! Or rather, Panti does. And she is made to feel so very welcome. Panti's nerves before her performance are entirely endearing, because of course who would have thought that the young lad who felt so out of place in Ballinrobe would come back and perform in such style, in such warm company?!

The movie is particularly relevant to those who currently identify as part of the trans community. Trans politics seems to be becoming sadly fractured and exclusive. During a time where some trans people accuse other trans people of being less than "authentic" and where some even call certain members of the trans umbrella "perverted" Panti provides a much needed reminder that all must stick together. She reminds us that the first person to instigate the riot at Stonewall was a drag queen, that she herself was at the vanguard for marriage equality, that each letter within LGBTQ stands for something more than a category but for a person. Panti reminds us that the fight we have is not within the LGBTQ+ spectrum but with people who don't respect this community. She brings each group in the LGBTQ+ community together at a time when the trans umbrella is being pushed apart.

And that is why Panti is the Queen of Ireland.