

# 'Everybody's Talking About Jamie' Is Vital for Today's Gender Fluid Generation.

'Everybody's Talking About Jamie' is a musical inspired by the 2011 BBC 3 documentary about Jamie Campbell, the 16-year-old County Durham schoolboy with ambitions to be a drag queen titled *Jamie: Drag Queen at 16*, a lad from a northern council estate. The show follows 16-year-old Jamie on his journey to be himself with the support of his mother Margrett. The documentary followed the process of Jamie preparing his drag persona and has helped drive the conversation of gender and expression.

The musical first made its appearance in Sheffield and it wasn't long before it started making its way to London, Apollo Theatre in October 2017 and won the Olivier award for Best Musical. Jamie overcomes prejudice, beats the bullies and steps out of the darkness, into the spotlight. I was lucky enough to be able to witness a wonderful show, a few weeks in the run, celebrating differences, accepting one's self. Gaining high praise from audiences and critics alike "is irresistible: a joyous, life-affirming *Billy Elliot* for an age struggling with the fluidities of gender identity." <sup>1</sup>

For this year's production beginning January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, a whole new cast took to the stage with Layton Williams (*Bad Education*) took on the role of Jamie New, with Shane Richie (*EastEnders*) taking the role of Jamie's mentor, Hugo/Loco Chanelle and Hayley Tamaddon (*Emmerdale & Dancing on Ice*) as Miss Hedge, his careers teacher. It was theatre director Jonathan Butterell who decided to turn the story into a musical, with the music composed by 'The Feeling' vocalist Dan Gillespie Sells and the musical itself was written by playwright Tom MacRae.

From the first song, many theatregoers, like myself, fell in love with the message and although there's a misconception of a young gay man in drag (a boy in a dress). A musical like this is very much needed in today's society of gender expression and fluidity, juxtaposed from centuries, and cultural differences, something for everyone who feels a little out of place, lacking self-acceptance and or somewhere they feel they belong. Layton Williams really makes the role of Jamie New his own with his star quality style and personality. There were moments where I was glassy-eyed when it came to some songs '*The Wall in My Head*'. The soundtrack of this fabulous show is like a bible for those who need that something to keep them winging at life and embrace the imperfect, uniqueness of us as individuals. Though this show is getting everyone talking and rightly so, there is still a bit to go in terms of LGBTQ+ stories in theatre, film and TV.

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<sup>1</sup> Everybody's Talking About Jamie Apollo Theatre review, Paul Taylor

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/everybodys-talking-about-jamie-apollo-theatre-review-a-billy-elliott-for-the-gender-fluid-age-a8069116.html>

We know stories like this are saving lives as for example attacks on LGBTQ+ people in the UK have surged almost 80% over the past four years <sup>2</sup> those statistics speak for themselves, the lack of acceptance, understanding – more voices and stories need and deserve to be heard and shows like *'Everybody's Talking About Jamie'* could be and or is life changing and it is because the real-life Jamie bravely told his story in the documentary and that in itself is giving those who don't fit in this 'box' a voice and the freedom to let go and own who you are.

As the current debate as of this year about whether LGBTQ+ Inclusivity should be taught in schools highlights why it's important to have these discussions to teach children that love and gender expression comes in many shapes and sizes, and *'Everybody's Talking About Jamie'* is doing just that. Young people learn negative behaviours very early on from outside influences, and perhaps their parents, therefore, it is our job as members of society to ensure that ALL these discriminatory views are challenged and eliminated to create a safe space for everyone to ensure LGBTQ+ students and teachers at school are not bullied or discriminated against simply for being who they are.

A musical like this is a fundamental production for today's gender fluid society and showcasing differences make you stronger and how we are all born to stand out whether we are gay, straight, bi-sexual, transgender, non-binary. It is breaking stereotypes and helping people, accept themselves. With a heartfelt touch, and music that gets you on your feet and singing along. The musical itself really is a 'Work of Art' (pun intended), for a show that champions tolerance and inclusivity with such heart, wit and flair about learning who you are and loving it. *'Everybody's Talking About Jamie'* really does matter for this generation and to open up the hearts of parents and grandparents and show that it's about a single message of acceptance and understanding, something that really is needed in this day and age.

*Everybody's Talking About Jamie* is the perfect injection of life, modernity and the sass that the West End and theatre as a whole is craving. It's a story about being yourself no matter what and facing your fears head on and stepping into the spotlight. It's about time there are shows that represent equality, gender and everything in-between which is what today's generation so clearly need, to be heard and signified so who knows what the next 5 years or so could bring for LGBTQ+ people. I hope it brings a safe haven for everyone in need of one.

*'Everybody's Talking About Jamie'* is now booking till September 2019 and it's worth every penny. Go and see it while you can. You can find the Original West End soundtrack on Spotify and iTunes.

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<sup>2</sup> Attacks on LGBT people surge almost 80% in UK over last four years, May Bulman  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/gay-lgbt-hate-crimes-stats-rise-four-year-physical-verbal-homophobic-abuse-community-a7933126.html>

## **REFERENCES:**

[1] Everybody's Talking About Jamie Apollo Theatre review, Paul Taylor, The Independent, 2017 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/everybodys-talking-about-jamie-apollo-theatre-review-a-billy-elliott-for-the-gender-fluid-age-a8069116.html>

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