**Small Town Boys: Programme Notes**

**Please note this document may contain spoilers.**

**Introduction**

In an electrifying fusion of dance, music, and storytelling, Small Town Boys thrusts audiences into the vibrant, yet perilous, world of the queer community during the 1980s and '90s. More than just a theatrical production, this is a powerful and immersive journey through a defining era, exploring themes of joy, persecution, love, and resilience.

**Set and Preshow**

The play opens not with a curtain, but with an invitation. The stage, transformed into a pulsating nightclub, beckons the audience to join the cast, who are already immersed in the joyous energy of the moment. The cast is dressed in 80s fashions and LGBTQIA+ subculture trends, with denims, a leather waistcoat and cap combo, and expressive accessories. A sign displaying the word “Paradise” is mounted on a flight case at the back of the space. A large mirror ball hangs center stage, casting blue, pink, and white spotlights across the dancing crowd. In the back right corner, a stack of TV screens stands ready to display visuals that will help narrate the story, such as press footage and slogans. The mood is electric.

**Scene: Small Town Boy/Clubbing**

The party is abruptly shattered. The lights go out, and the TV screens flicker with a jarring sequence of words: "joy," "lust," "fear," "lives," "sex," "drop," "time," "now." This visual montage is broken by a chilling clip of Margaret Thatcher’s infamous speech defending Section 28, followed by a barrage of hateful press headlines about the AIDS crisis. The contrast is stark, juxtaposing the community's joy with the systemic prejudice it faced. The scene crescendos with footage of LGBTQIA+ nightclub crowds and Section 28 protests, before the play’s title, Small Town Boys, appears framed within the pink triangle.

This shift in tone introduces the cast of eight as they move from quiet observation to explosive dance. The first few scenes establish the underground clubbing scene for the queer community as a place of refuge. We meet our host, Cardinal Disco, a flamboyant figure in a sparkly gold outfit and red beret, who welcomes us into this world with a sermon-like flair. A choreographed routine begins where Cardinal is lifted up by four male dancers, carried in the air with arms stretched in a crucifix stance.

Amid this spectacle, we meet the titular Small Town Boy, a character on the fringes of this new world. Cardinal Disco pulls him into the spotlight, initiating a powerful solo dance to Bronski Beat's 'Smalltown Boy.' The dance mirrors his journey of self-discovery, with a single bed acting as a portal to his past. We see scenes including an awkward first kiss with a girl, childhood bullying, and a moment of genuine connection with a new friend that sparks joy and excitement.

The scene shifts again, with dancers depicting the act of cottaging. Small Town Boy throws himself into the group, appearing euphoric, but the tone shifts dramatically as we see him being attacked and thrown to the ground. The segment culminates in his father discovering a gay porn image and throwing him out of the house. A brief, tender moment with his mother serves as a final goodbye before he is left to find his own way.

**Scene: Stripper/Cruising Scene**

The play transitions back to the club's high-energy atmosphere with a stripper performance, a celebration of body and sexuality, followed by an ensemble dance. The scene then delves into the private world of cruising and anonymous encounters. Two dancers hook up and move to the "toilets," represented by cast members holding up cubicle doors. Flashes of suggested sexual activity and drug use escalate into a depiction of an orgy. This moment of intense intimacy and abandon is abruptly broken by the sound of a frantic heartbeat and panicked breathing, as one dancer discovers lesions on their body.

**Scene: Annie Lennox/Eurythmics: "Here comes the rain again"**

The mood becomes somber as the TV screens begin broadcasting news reports about the HIV virus. The cast, with solemn gravity, dances with air-filled condoms, holding them close like partners before letting them go and catching them again. This poignant dance to Eurythmics' "Here comes the rain again" sees the dancers sink lower and lower until they lie lifeless on the floor. Only two dancers are left standing.

**Scene - "Died in your arms tonight"**

The story then focuses on a pair of lovers. The bed returns to the stage, and their dance is a heart-wrenching push and pull of magnetic attraction and desperate separation. They embrace on the bed as the TV screens once again show dramatic, fear-mongering news reports about the virus. The lovers break apart, and the Small Town Boy is left to dance solo, his movements now jerky and unnatural.

**Scene: The Protest**

The play pivots to protest and resistance. Dancers in T-shirts emblazoned with slogans like "Action = Power" and "Silence = Death" form a protest scene. A megaphone-wielding protester’s words are echoed by a dancer whose movements become strained kicks and punches. A powerful drumbeat unites the ensemble in a protest dance, including one person being lifted on the shoulders of the collective, a collective roar, everyone linking together in a line and breaking the line to create a makeshift platform of bodies from which a speaker at the protest is lifted above the crowd and finally a march to the chants of ‘Stop killing us’. The Community Cast enters the stage wielding cardboard protest signs, marching around the parameters chanting slogans and making eye contact with the audience.

**Scene. "Drive" by The Cars**

As the 80s classic ‘Drive’ by The Cars plays, the momentum shifts again with a moving, slow dance routine of partners clinging to loved ones who slip away and collapse to the floor, their bodies bearing words of hate like "Sin" and "Damned." The scene ends with a final, devastating collapse as a partner falls to the floor.

**Scene - Grief at a candlelit vigil**

A somber candlelit vigil follows. The cast, now a grieving community, holds candles as they support one another. They leave their candles on the stage around a solitary, lifeless body. This body, however, is not a final image of despair. The solitary figure sits up, stands, and walks into a mist of blue hues.

**Scene - Monologue: “We dance until night fades, leaving us with this grief and outrage.”**

Cardinal Disco, crying and clutching a phone, delivers a poignant monologue, "We dance until night fades, leaving us with this grief and outrage," while other characters enter the stage, clutching phones, receiving symbolic phone calls of loss and death.

**Scene - Hospital**

The scene is a nightmarish hospital sequence. A man is rushed to the hospital, his partner and friends forbidden from being with him. He suffers alone as Thatcher’s voice, now blaring from both sides of the stage, compounds his isolation. This scene is interrupted by his friends arriving, recreating a joyful and flamboyant Vogue Ballroom scene at his bedside to lift his spirits. But the joy is short-lived, as the cast transforms into a grotesque representation of the virus, attacking, grabbing, and taking over his body in a red-lit, sinister climax. Bursting onto the stage comes Maggie Thatcher, Union Jack flags in her dishevelled hair, her infamous blue suit in burnt rags hanging off her body. She shouts at the ill man to ‘Stop Being A Victim!’ declaring the state of the world her ‘Apocalypse’. Tired of her hateful speech and the actions of the Tory government, the man delivers a damning speech of her actions and morals, banishing her and her prejudice from the stage.

**Scene – "More Life"**

This scene we see the man die in the hospital, his final wish being for ‘more life’.

**Scene - The Last Dance**

The show concludes with a powerful statement of perseverance. The ensemble regroups for a final defiant dance before taking their bows. We hear whooping from the crowds and applause. The cast jumps and punches the air, raising their arms to the sky. The feeling is jubilant again. Through a masterful blend of dance, music, and powerful imagery, the production asserts that dance is not just an expression of joy, but a vital act of survival and resistance. The performance ends with the characters we have seen die during the show, dancing in silhouette in front of the Paradise sign before it flickers and is extinguished.