Dancing in the Garden—Where Faith and Love Collide

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by **Sarah Wieboldt** on *Playing Around*

There's much food for thought in Michael Walker's *Dancing in the Garden* at The Living Theatre. Walker's play follows young Maria Tanglia as she struggles to reconcile her strong sense of faith with her homosexuality. Growing up in a strict Catholic home, where being gay is considered a sin, Maria's emerging sexuality leads to a series of emotional ups and downs.

Judith Knight Young (below, left) is a force as Maria's overprotective mother, Rosa, whose unwavering belief leads her to view Maria's sexual preference to be as sinful as murder. Maria, played by an engaging Sarah Corey (below, right), struggles for a universe where love and acceptance can coexist. The harsh and unforgiving Rosa contrasts alongside her sympathetic husband, Angelo (Joe Gioco). Where the relationship between Rosa and Maria is stifling, Angelo and Maria together find a way towards compassion and forgiveness. Gioco is a kind reminder of those who bring a breath of fresh air when desperately needed.

Outside the family, Maria discovers Dani, a lesbian whose comfort in her own skin contrasts sharply with Maria's uncertainty. Cathy Prince shines in the role of Dani, displaying the confidence that eludes Maria. Father Mike (Sam Kitchin) is a happy reminder that there can be a balance between love and faith. We find ourselves thanking him for the timid Maria's sake.

While the concept of the play is simple—a young woman struggling with the contradiction between her faith as a Catholic and her new found and explored homosexuality—the delivery is fresh and powerful. In fact, this play with a heart has us examining the struggle for acceptance in our own lives.

With a minimal set and a cast of only five, the writing is what makes the play so powerful. A typical love story it's not, but *Dancing in the Garden* is an enjoyable and memorable tale of pain, joy and eventually true happiness.

The Living Theatre
21 Clinton Street