

Theatre review: Ana, Traverse Theatre (***)

☒ As Darwin was formulating his theories of evolution, Ana was there. On Freud's consulting couch, Ana was there. Even at the battle lines of the French revolution, Ana was there. From Skye in the Dark Ages to a contemporary Canadian shopping mall, Ana is always there.

In this epic bilingual new play, a collaboration between Scotland's Stellar Quines Theatre Company and Montreal's Imago Theatre and co-written by Clare Duffy and Pierre Yves Lemieux, Ana is everywoman, discernable in everyone from Joan of Arc to a Quebecois bag lady. When confronted with an impossible decision, she splits – literally – to follow both paths. By now she is infinite, and everywhere.

☒ It's a fascinating conceit that's presented very entertainingly – if not always entirely comprehensibly – in a slick cabaret-style production, directed by Serge Denoncourt, that presents the audience with snapshots from centuries of history, as well as highlighting the unbearable choices that women have long had to make.

Alain Goulem, the sole male cast member, is a convincingly sinister ringmaster who brings a degree of coherence to the wide-ranging tableaux, and the six women who play the multitude of different Anas each add something unique to their roles. Frances Thorburn is touching as an abandoned child; Magalie Lépine-Blondeau seethes as the prostitute muse to French painter Jacques-Louis David; and the imposing Catherine Bégin rather steals the show in glorious performances as a Parisian whore-house madam and a Canadian down-and-out.

It's not always entirely clear where things are going, or how we've got to where we are, but that's only a mark of the

production's huge ambitions. Unexpected events and objects endowed with strange powers might sometimes lead the story down bizarre narrative cul-de-sacs, and there's the unavoidable sense that the magical world the production inhabits might make anything, however improbable, possible. At times *Ana* is bewildering, at others perplexing, but it's never less than fascinating.

***Ana* continues at the [Traverse Theatre](#) until Saturday 10 March, then travelling to the [Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh](#), [Gardyne Theatre, Dundee](#), [Eden Court, Inverness](#), and [Tron Theatre, Glasgow](#).**

