

Edinburgh Fringe Review: The Letter of Last Resort/Good With People ****



It's Britain's shadowy nuclear deterrent, and in particular Scotland's role in maintaining it, that's the fragile yet potent theme binding this duo of plays by two of the country's finest dramatists. David Greig's *The Letter of Last Resort* is a dark political comedy bristling with wit, while David Harrower's *Good With People* explores political exchanges on a human level. But the Trident submarines based at Faslane cast threatening shadows over both plays, which chart the personal and political costs of their weapons' existence.

In *The Letter of Last Resort*, a new prime minister is required to compose a missive to the submarine commanders detailing what action they should take in the event of a decapitating nuclear attack on the UK. Greig is thorough in his investigation of the philosophical and moral conundrums of the issue, yet he plays it with an admirable lightness – ice-cold jokes and chilling absurdities fly around the room as, of course, the ultimate futility of the situation is comprehended. Belinda Lang is fiery yet controlled as the new PM, concealing her increasing frustration underneath a blustering exterior, and Simon Chandler is oily as the official from 'arrangements' who requests the letter.

Harrower's two-hand *Good With People* brings together a young man and an older woman whose son he mercilessly bullied at school, to explore their memories and prejudices in the playwright's trademark gritty yet poetic language. Blythe Duff simmers as Helen – whether with anger or passion we discover over the course of the play – and Richard Rankin has an

appropriate swagger as the posturing but wounded Evan.

It's very much a performance of two halves – in subject, content and tone – but the telling thematic connections and exemplary stagings make for a thought-provoking pairing.

[A Letter of Last Resort/Good With People](#) continues at the [Traverse Theatre](#) until 26 August (times vary).