

Theatre review: Charlie and My '45 & I Promise I Shall Not Play Billiards, Scottish Storytelling Centre (***)



Edinburgh-based company [Tightlaced Theatre](#)'s interesting double bill of new short plays at the Scottish Storytelling Centre has a historical theme, with both works offering new perspectives on episodes from the country's history. But if you're expecting cosy costume drama, think again: these are fresh, thoughtful pieces that probe and question.

With its period clothing and schmaltzy music, Robert Howat's *Charlie and My '45* might start off with a bit of a cosy costume feel, but it soon moves into darker and more challenging territory. Following the fortunes of a young Scottish villager caught up in the Jacobite uprisings and joining Bonnie Prince Charlie on his ill-fated march towards London, it neatly contrasts naive hope and optimism with a growing sense of disillusionment as the realities of the conflict are increasingly felt.

Howat himself is convincingly naturalistic in the title role, with an easy charm that slowly melts into bleak despair. His three-hander started life as a monologue, and you can tell in Howat's sometimes rather lengthy speeches, but he's a compelling enough performer to keep us rapt throughout.

Adrienne Zitt is the voice of reason as his wife Mary, although the character is rather underdeveloped. David McFarlane seems to struggle slightly in the dual roles of the Prince and lecherous villager Kilbreek, but their dramatic functions could perhaps be fleshed out more strongly.

After the interval, Fiona McDonald's intriguing titled *I Promise I Shall Not Play Billiards* is a fascinating take on the case of 19th-century Glasgow socialite Madeleine Smith, accused of poisoning her lover Emile L'Angelier. McDonald takes the later trial's verdict of 'not proven' as her starting point for her intriguing conception, which fractures Smith into four separate women, each representing one aspect of the mysterious woman, or our differing views on her, as cold-blooded killer, social go-getter or meek innocent.

✘ With the four contrasting Madeleines – each strongly characterised – doing strange waltzes around the stage in their starched crinolines, McDonald's play quickly questions the roles we feel compelled to assign to women, and has much to say about our current obsession with celebrity. It might rely a little too heavily on rather lengthy monologues, but its central idea is a strong and rewarding one.

[Charlie and My '45 & I Promise I Shall Not Play Billiards](#)
**continue at the [Scottish Storytelling Centre](#) until Saturday 10
November**