

Theatre review: Sonata for A Man and A Boy, Traverse Theatre (****)



It starts as a run-of-the-mill cello lesson – scales, tunes, duets. Comments and corrections from the teacher; little attempts at mischief from the pupil. But Edinburgh-based musician and actor Greg Sinclair's playful theatre-cum-music-cum-dance piece soon spins off into wilder, more abstract territory – mime, movement and a mysterious glowing monolith – as the two performers explore their relationship, and what it means to be a child or a grown-up.

It's a risky concept – bringing together a grown man and an 11-year-old could so easily descend into sentimentality or sickly sweetness. But Sinclair's *Sonata for A Man and A Boy* never does – and it's a measure of his skill that he manages to balance sometimes child-like humour and playfulness with a clear-headed exploration of his themes.

And they're both remarkable performers – disarmingly sincere and refreshingly open. Sinclair is understated but knowing, conveying all his worries or joys in a raised eyebrow or frown. He balances precariously with only his cello bow for support, and he plays the instrument beautifully.

More astonishing, though, is Bartek Bialucki (who's nearly 12), who carries off playing his instrument, acting and movement with the ease of someone far older. At times he plays the traditional youngster's role of pupil or follower, copying Sinclair's movements or responding to his instructions (sometimes reluctantly). At others he takes the lead (with relish), enjoying wild musical excursions or directing a shut-eyed Sinclair around the box-strewn set.

And as befits its title, there's a musical elegance to the piece's exposition and development of its themes. It does indeed seem a sonata, played by two actor-musicians. But instead of using melodies, it's fragments of text, movements, or even ideas that recur and combine throughout the piece – from the teacher's question 'Are you ready?' to moments of reverential pause before a curious spotlighted monolith. Sometimes it's in admittedly abstract ways, but it's often in new and surprising contexts.

At 50 minutes it feels quite slight, but there's an impressive economy to the piece that means not a gesture or sound is wasted. And there's much for children and adults alike in its striking images and mischievous humour.

[Sonata for A Man and A Boy](#) continues at the [Traverse Theatre](#) until 24 November