

The Herald
Ch Ch Changes, Citizens Theatre, Glasgow ****
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The words, according to writer Martin O'Connor, came originally from the memories of men within the LGBT community.

Men of a certain age. Around the 50 mark. Men old enough to remember when it wasn't advisable – or indeed legal – to be actively open about their sexuality. And so the words that O'Connor has wrought into five anecdotal monologues carry more than confiding echoes of personal turmoils or secret pleasures: they jigsaw into a broader historical context full of censure and prejudice, even loathing and aggression. To say nothing of possible prosecution.

Grant Smeaton takes those words and, like a sympathetic chameleon, finds a believable character for each episode – and by his voice, his whole demeanour, reveals that man to us, even without the costuming changes he effects while grooving to David Bowie songs of the period. First off, he's the sharp dresser who swapped hidebound Glasgow for liberated 1980s New York, his swaggering descriptions of that scene nonetheless spiked with rueful moments – the ex stayed behind, stayed closeted. Alive, but not really living, his true identity still hidden even at his funeral.

This void of self-betrayal and the need to be honest – with oneself, if not always with others – is at the heart of these perceptively profound miniatures. If there's mischievous glee in the experiences of a sensual cross-dresser, there's painful uncertainty and a sense of loss in the voice of another dutiful father whose heterosexual marriage is finally over. And again and again, through the various reminiscences comes the thought that times have changed, are more tolerant, more equal. This great-hearted amalgam of resonant texts and superb acting reminds us to appreciate that.