

Theatre review: Submarine Time Machine

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Published: 10:41 Tuesday 27 June 2017

Along the banks of the Forth & Clyde Canal, near the National Theatre of Scotland's new home, something is stirring. There's an old puffer costumed up like a home-made submarine; there are strange figures in period or science-fiction dress popping up and down on the towpath. And all along, from Speirs Wharf to Firhill, there are signs inviting us to pause and reflect on the rich, dramatic history of this stretch of water, once a thriving hub of Glasgow's lost heavy industries, from the day in 1952 when two wee lads spotted a midget submarine surfacing, to Whisky Galore-like tales of rich cargoes lost and found in the canal.

Submarine Time Machine

Speirs Wharf, Glasgow

The whole show, performed by a team of professional actors with members of the local community, is written in strong rhyming couplets by the show's writer-director, Simon Sharkey. Some segments are just too long and wordy, leading to a two-hour experience that would be stronger and more vivid at 90 minutes or so. At their best, though, the scenes are unforgettable: the story of the wee boy who "pulled the plug" in the canal superbly re-created by local schoolchildren, Michelle Gallagher's pregnant wartime air-raid warden, Alan McHugh as Captain Smith of the submarine, leading us through time. And the point of the show, of course, is that this is the vital moment when the NTS shows its new community that its "theatre without walls" mantra is more than a slogan; that its mission is to tell Scotland's stories, and that that includes the stories of the battered and fast-changing part of Glasgow where it will now build its future.