Bottom's Dream
★★★★
Traverse Theatre

Review by Hugh Simpson
The last in this season of Òran Mór's A Play, A Pie and A Pint at the Traverse, is a good one to go out on. Bottom's Dream, written and performed by Martin O'Connor, is clever and constantly amusing, making necessary and cogent points about the theatre.
As the title suggests, this focuses on a celebrated character from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Nick Bottom, the weaver and super-keen amateur actor who wants to play every role in the mechanicals' depiction of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, is transformed into a modern-day performer who is just as eager to tread the boards.
This Bottom is still a weaver by day, studying acting at night and doing the round of auditions. Little seems to have changed since Shakespeare's day, when the nobles spoke in iambic pentameter and the lower orders knew their prosaic place.

Indeed, opportunities for working-class actors are even thinner on the ground than they were. Entitled poshos have got the contacts, the connections and the expectations. All that is left for the Bottoms of the world is the obligatory role of criminal, drunkard or junkie. And the rich kids can even do those; after all, it isn't really cheating, it's just acting and playing at being lower-class.

O'Connor combines Shakespearean text (largely, but not entirely, from the Dream) with smart, pithy, humorous, accessible Scots verse and stand-up elements. The effect is pacy, funny and sharply political. The performance, meanwhile, is sympathetic, with excellent comic timing and a tremendous rapport with the audience.

There is a balance struck between the political points and the humour, with a great deal of poignancy in the performance. The Shakespearean references are cleverly integrated but always lightly worn; someone with no knowledge whatsoever of the original would still get a great deal out of this.

Debbie Hannan's direction is similarly inventive and clever; unlike some one-handers, there are no moments of artificiality or hesitation. Things keep moving along constantly, and the time flies by.
It helps that O' Connor is such an engaging presence, and that Heather Grace Currie's minimal but creative design and Ana Reid's striking lighting add so much to the visual impact. Ross Nurney's sound design, meanwhile, making much use of harpsichords and acoustic guitar, is also extremely clever.

The narrative does lose its way a little towards the end, dissolving into somewhat artificial examinations of social media fame and a certain amount of wish-fulfilment, but the overall effect is very pleasing. There is a rhythm and a vitality to this production that is hard to gainsay.