Theatre review: Bottom's Dream
Òran Mór, Glasgow
Neil Cooper

★★★★

If a working-class hero is something to be, then why does so much theatre still sideline the so-called lower orders as servants, sidekicks or light relief doing the dirty work or else playing the donkey for their masters and mistresses ad nauseam? While lead stage roles are left to the posh boys and girls, the common people remain cast as criminals and crooks.

Or maybe that was just William Shakespeare, who gets caught bang to rights in Martin O'Connor's ingenious peek behind the curtain in A Play, a Pie and a Pint's latest edition of lunchtime theatre.

Here we find A Midsummer Night's Dream's Rude Mechanical and wannabe thespian Nick Bottom, who seems condemned to play the fool forever. Debbie Hannan's production begins with Bottom the jobbing actor auditioning for the play within a play that features in Shakespeare's play when Bottom gets to live the high life for a while.

By turns nervous, apologetic and desperate to impress, Bottom's turn is a composite of every drama student's toe curling first steps into showbiz. Stepping beyond this, O'Connor's own solo recitation lays out Bottom's offstage life as a weaver. His thwarted ambitions to become part of the gang beyond the day job leave him dismissed as an ass, while grand dames like Titania hold court.

Moving around Heather Grace Currie's mustard coloured set from waiting room folding chair to stand-up club microphone, O'Connor's comic chops come to the fore in a brilliantly realised confection. Crucially, rather than have Bottom's bid for the big time relayed in less than purple prose as assorted bards might do, Bottom delivers all this in pithy Scots verse that runs across what is essentially a cycle of narrative poems given the rich dramatic life it deserves.

At the heart of Bottom's address in his attempts to be heard, O'Connor is giving voice to all the awkward kids with ideas above their station trying to get a gig. As demonstrated here with an unabashed sense of triumph at the end, sometimes – and probably only sometimes - dreams can come true.