

Theatre

The Mark Of The Beast

Platform, The Bridge, Glasgow

Mary Brennan

★★★★★

“Whit ye huvin?” The voice has a chirrupy geniality to it: pure Glesca’ camaraderie. “Ur ye huvin’ a drink or no?” The camaraderie is now teetering on the querulous, the aggressive even. Offence is on the verge of being taken, here. Minutes into this pithy, comedic, often harrowing monologue about various shades of alcohol addiction, writer/performer Martin O’Connor has wheeled us inside a pub, and into the core shorthand of belonging – of being a mate, a part of a community – that is inherent in the offer of a pint.

One pint... unseen voices chip in with memories of the wee swally that first introduced them – often, as far back as childhood – to the compulsive disorder of getting totally bloated. The recorded voices belong to Glasgow’s North-East Recovery Community: mixed into Nichola Scrutton’s chorale-cum-sound design, they will add personal witness to O’Connor’s tangy, savvy progress through the cumulative effects of long-term alcohol abuse. There’s the bilious heartburn of self-loathing, the upsurge of resolve - “Ah’m affit..” - and the lonely isolation of battling your demons when your pals remain in the boozier.

There’s a graphically vicious section when a posse of well-dressed lads become a pack of drunken thugs, relentlessly kicking a total stranger just because... because he was there. It all sounds, feels, pungently real.

O’Connor’s talent for morphing social documentation into a bravura prose-poem pivots merrily on the rhythms of everyday Glesca’ patois, but – back-lit by designer Fergus Dunnet’s row of stained glass windows – he offsets the gallus patter with the soaring fire and brimstone of biblical texts, juggling revelations and hallucinations in a linguistic cocktail of those abiding havens: bevvy and religion. We laugh a lot, because O’Connor understands bathos but he never mocks the alcohol-afflicted, or diminishes their trials in what is a truly exceptional piece of work.