

Still and Signs of Life by Cormac Quinn

Cormac Quinn is fast distinguishing himself as a name to watch. The young Glasgow-based playwright won enthusiastic plaudits with his thematically linked two-handers, *Still and Signs of Life*, when the double bill was staged at the Ramshorn by director Andy Corelli last year. *Still* featured a pair of characters, Ach and Agus, trapped in some undefined limbo, gradually piecing together their memories, until a shocking portrait of violence, injustice and destruction emerged, while *Signs of Life* subtly explored the fine line between sanity and madness through two astronauts on a lonely, 'Space Oddity'-style mission.

Now, the same duo of short plays is being dusted down and restaged at Edinburgh's fledgling GRV theatre space, courtesy of Corelli and his company, *Siege Perilous*. The difference this time round is that, where the protagonists in both originals were female, the pieces have now been reworked with male leads.

As Quinn points out, this simple conceit of switching the protagonists' gender is enough to alter the dynamics of each play, before the text has been touched. 'The first play hasn't changed at all,' he says. 'It was always intended as a neutral piece, and, because it's about political violence, the original decision to cast two female actors was quite arresting – we don't tend to associate that kind of violence with female characters. The names of the characters in *Signs of Life* have changed, though textually it hasn't changed that much. I wanted to switch it around, to think about a parallel crew in a parallel universe. With male leads, you get more pathos in the softer moments because it's so unexpected.'

While the plays are reminiscent of Pinter and Beckett in their exploration of contemporary issues through a heightened, seemingly absurd situation, Quinn cites JB Priestley's so-called 'Time Plays' (which experiment with different notions of time) as a particular influence. 'Priestley made me realise that no concept is too fantastical for an audience, if correctly delivered, even within the confines of a conventional theatrical style. I like when a playwright makes a point, political or otherwise, and takes you on a journey. In my own writing I always try to bring it back to character, and I try to aim for subtlety.'