

'Standing Stanes' by Robert Ballantine ☆☆☆☆

Caught amidst the conflicts of the 1980s Cold War and his own personal relationships, dreamer Craig (Matt Robertson) has a vision: to build a monument of modern-day megaliths to rival Stonehenge on a patch of disused land near Dundee.

Used to his schemes and deals, long-suffering fiancée Kim (LaVerne Hawthorne) is at first sceptical. Then, as Craig's plan looks set to turn from dreams into reality, she too is caught up in his excitement: until the things he has to do to convince the politicians, bureaucrats and landowners to endorse his plan begin to threaten their relationship.

Standing Stanes is the latest production from Leith-based theatre company Siege Perilous, and the first to be staged in their new home at Malmaison. Director Andy Corelli takes Robert Ballantine's never-performed absurdist romp and has a great deal of fun with it, using a sparse set and an intimate venue to recreate all the booms and busts of the 80s, to a cleverly woven scene-specific soundtrack.

Thus we see Derek Banner's deranged government boffin arranging the set to the sounds of Thomas Dolby's *She Blinded Me With Science*; and Robertson, Banner and fourth cast member Mark Kydd dancing a perfectly-choreographed punchup to the strains of Cameo's *Word Up*.

The cast appear to be having an equal amount of fun with the piece: Kydd and Banner in particular as they slip on a variety of metaphorical masks in a number of comic supporting roles. Robertson is a likable lead, and portrays Craig's impossible-to-dampen enthusiasm with aplomb. Hawthorne is excellent in both of her main roles: as Kim, a surprisingly well-rounded character amidst the rest of *Standing Stanes'* caricatures; and as the hippy femme fatale Penelope, who slinkily makes Craig a fateful offer he can't refuse.

As the piece gathers an increasingly absurd momentum, revolving around the plot device of an anti-Communist sterilising ray, Corelli's direction (aided by technical assistance from Kirstin Rodger, Dave Moffat and Caitlin McBride) comes into its own. Somehow, he manages to pull off scenes which flit from the dark corridors of Whitehall power to open-air rock

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concerts without causing confusion; and instead of lagging, the piece romps along at a satisfying pace throughout its 75-minute length.

Though it may not have the permanence of the monument of its title, *Standing Stones* is an effortlessly enjoyable and playful piece that consistently entertains. And, despite being set in unemployment-ridden Britain in the 80s, it has little in the way of political message or heavy-handed satire. Instead, its central themes are more the stuff of fairytales: how a hero's determination will always succeed; and, of course, how love can conquer all.

Keith D; "Edinburgh Spotlight"