

Six of the best for Errant King

Ladies in Waiting: The Judgement of Henry VIII
theSpace on the Mile (V39)



“What is this place?” Henry VIII awakens to find himself in purgatory, confronted by all of his six wives. They’re here, as a kind of jury, to judge him for the way he treated them- and they’re not happy. It may not sound like the most original of concepts, but writer James Cougar Canfield (who also plays a highly believable Henry) breathes life into each of the women’s individual voices with such force that, even by the time we get to number six, they’re thrilling to listen to.

“Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived,” they chant between each of the exchanges, until Anne Boleyn cuts them off with “I can take it from here.” The star at the centre of these powerful figures, she laughs at Henry, “I’m more than a martyr, I’m a legend.” The irony is that in order to try and dispose of the women he impulsively married, the Tudor king ended up making them some of the most famous queens in history.

While Anne Boleyn argues with Henry, Anne of Cleves scoffs at the title she’s given as “sister” because she was “too ugly,” and Catherine of Aragon runs the country while her husband’s away fighting. “You may think you understand politics,” she says to Henry, “but you will never understand what it’s like to be a woman trapped by politics.”

The performers all do a great job of defining women who can often get grouped into one homogenous mass as “Henry’s Wives,” delivering Canfield’s pacey dialogue with strength and poise, wittily highlighting the contradictions of a man who would behead women for having affairs while behaving the same way himself.

Desperate to be remembered, Henry is ultimately confronted with the fact that a large part of his legacy is one of the most iconic leaders the world has ever seen: Elizabeth I of England.

- Sally Stott, The Scotsman