

## THEATRE

**KES**  
BRUNTON THEATRE,  
MUSSELBURGH

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IF YOU ARE a fan of Barry Hines's fine novel *A Kestrel For A Knave* - a serious, interested, grown-up fan, who also appreciates Ken Loach's great 1969 film version of the story - then you'll find plenty to enjoy and reflect on in Catherine Wheels's sombre new 70-minute stage adaptation. Rightly recommended not for young children but for "everyone aged 10 and over", it's on tour around Scotland until November.

Set by designer Karen Tennant on a broken junk-heap of 1960s working-class dreams, Rob Evans's thoughtful two-handed version brings the 15-year-old boy Billy Caspar, who finds joy in training up a kestrel chick he has found in the woods near his loveless home, into confrontation with his middle-aged self. The older

self - Billy as he might have been today, in his late fifties - is a wiry ex-miner, perhaps on the brink of death; a kindly figure who tries to prevent the final disaster towards which Hines's narrative drives so inexorably.

In the end, Evans's version - staged in a searching, elusive style, with beautiful but enigmatic filmed images of woodland and countryside - often seems more like a history lesson in the horrors of 1960s working-class life and schooling, than a full and balanced evocation of Hines's story. The soaring beauty the boy finds in his relationship with Kes is described but not fully seen, unlike the brutality of his family and teachers; and the result is a version that lacks the driving, yearning narrative energy this story should always embody.

What it does offer, though, is a pair of deeply moving, meditative performance from James Anthony Pearson as Billy, and Sean Murray as his older self; and if their story is often dense and demanding in the telling, the image of the distraught older man, trying to save the unloved boy from the a tragedy that will darken his life, is one that haunts the memory.

**JOYCE MCMILLAN**