

ENERGETIC DRAMA HAS THE AUDIENCE SOARING

Kes
Brunton Theatre,
Musselburgh ★★★★★

THEATRE HAPPY-CLAPPY Billy Elliot

it isn't, but this slick adaptation by Rob Evans brings out the hope in its famously bleak source novel *A Kestrel For A Knave* by Barry Hines.

Kes is all about Billy, a kid who never gets a chance in life in a harsh Yorkshire mining town. As his uncaring school and family gradually chip away at his spirit, Billy finds escape by catching and training a wild kestrel. While *Kes* is in the air, Billy is flying too.

This production lets the audience inside Billy's head. The novel and Ken Loach's film version, *Kes*, are both very realistic, but here events, people and passions are muddled together in Billy's mind. He at once lives his story and looks back on it as an older character, the Man. Gritty portraits of mining life aside, *Kes* is all about Billy.

Billy is played by James Anthony Pearson (of *Jeopardy* and *Lip Service* fame) as though the sheer force of his personality is bursting through his skin. He fills the theatre with his energy, bouncing all over the set. He hypnotises the audience with the huge circular movements of his lure as he flings it into the sky for the kestrel to chase.

The other characters are brought to life by the versatile Sean Murray, who gets his best reaction from the audience playing Billy's mum. Although he plays the fidgety, sex-riddled woman for laughs, he brings out the sadness of her life too.

Gill Robertson's direction



DUO: Sean Murray, left, plays the other characters to James Anthony Pearson's Billy

twists the play intricately, making sure there is never a still moment. The overall dream-like effect of the production is enhanced by beautiful, subtle projections. The music, on the other hand, is not subtle at all. Playing

for most of the stage time, it winds up being oppressive rather than atmospheric.

One obvious absence from the stage is *Kes*, the kestrel herself. The audience has to imagine her, and that makes Billy's joy and total delight

in her existence even more touching.

■ *Run ended. Tours to The Traverse November 1 and 2*

James T Harding

★ Don't bother ★★ Average
★★★ Good ★★★★ Great
★★★★★ Kill for tickets