

# THE SCOTSMAN

6 FESTIVAL | The Scotsman Wednesday 9 August 2006



JOYCE McMILLAN

STRAWBERRIES IN  
JANUARY  
★★★★  
TRAVERSE THEATRE  
(VENUE 15)

There's nothing in any of these three shows, though, that quite matches the happy surprise factor of discovering, on the Edinburgh Fringe, a yuppie comedy that overcomes all possible objections to the genre by infusing it with a quality of pure joy, an almost irresistible lightness of heart.

Evelyne de la Chenelière's *Strawberries In January* – one of the plays to emerge from the Traverse's long-standing Playwrights In Partnership project with the province of Quebec – is a pure romantic comedy written for four characters set in contemporary Montreal, full of the outrageous coincidences that are the lifeblood of the genre.

The more blokeish blokes in the audience are unlikely to enjoy the foolish stars in its eyes, or its unfashionable emphasis on a final wedding scene. But everything about the development of the story and production – from the sparkling pace and quiet observational sharpness of the original play, through Rona Munro's superb Scots-accented English version, to Gabriel Quigley's magnificent, quirky and adorable performance as the heroine – is perfectly achieved, with a delicious, lightweight energy.

Director Roxana Silbert, and everyone involved in this Traverse-Paines Plough co-production, can be proud of their success in evoking the very spirit of human happiness, in times that make that perhaps the most difficult project of all.