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It's So Nice explores relationship between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I

French performers are aiming to throw light on history at Edinburgh Fringe

A pair of French performers are aiming to throw light on the relationship between [Mary Queen of Scots](#) and [Elizabeth I](#).

Talk about coals to Newcastle. Barbara Sylvain and Lula Béry are a French/Belgian double act who thought it'd be a good idea to bring a show about Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I to Scotland. The 16th-century tale of the francophone Mary and her virginal counterpart, monarchs of neighbouring countries who never met, is a cornerstone of the Scottish tourism industry, not to mention the stage work of [Friedrich Schiller](#) and [Liz Lochhead](#), so their comic lecture-cum-physical theatre piece has some tough competition.

The good news is [It's So Nice](#) is tremendous fun. Part of a beefed-up Fringe programme at [the French Institute](#), it's a quirky bilingual history play that combines oddball film footage from the Scottish heritage trail with Lecoq-inspired physical theatre and deadpan comedy.

'We went on the trail of Mary Stuart to see what Scotland was now,' says Sylvain when we meet at the [Avignon Festival](#). 'It was interesting to see how strong the story was for the Scottish people. We're excited to play in Edinburgh, but we're wondering how it will be received by the Scottish public.'

What attracted the two performers to the story, who were more inspired by a 1930s biography by [Stefan Zweig](#) than the male-heavy world of Schiller's Mary Stuart, was the chance to play such powerful women. 'Stefan Zweig's book has a nice understanding of these two women,' she says. 'It's not Elizabeth, the ugly woman and Mary, the poor girl. No, it's more subtle, psychological and intelligent. For us it was perfect, because there's no black and white: it's a mix, like all of us are.' Throw in a spot of quirky humour and you have a show that's as entertaining as it is thoughtful. 'We play with the ridiculous,' says Béry. 'Sometimes, the life of these women was very difficult, but there was light too.'

Mark FISHER

It's So Nice, Institut francais d'Ecosse, 225 5366, 4-24 Aug (not 11 & 12, 18 & 19), 4pm