

Review by Mary Brennan – The Herald
Songbird ****

By the end, many of us, regardless of age, were blinking back tears. A handful had been fidgety, not sure what to make of this self-styled tone poem or whether this fabulous outpouring of moodshifting, melodic soundscapes was to their taste.

This response from a family audience probably reflects how strange and different this Giant production is - there hadn't been a homegrown piece quite like it before for the audience of eight-year-olds and over (including children with special needs) from director Katrina Caldwell and composer David Paul Jones.

Ravishing and poignant, the piece is a gem of alluring composition. But the cast, led by Jones at an on-stage piano, enter into the spirit of his sound poetry with a passion and sensitivity that ensures Caldwell's tragic scenario catches our imagination and conscience. Judith Williams, plumed in a vibrant costume designed by Brian Hartley, is utterly engaging as the doomed exotic bird rescued from an endangered forest only to be exhibited (in echoes of the King Kong story) as a singing marvel on city stages. Vocally, she has the trilling sweetness that soothes the ear and her body language reinforces this with a wealth of astute detail. There is a sense of vulnerability that makes you know the entrepreneurial figure (played by Rachel Hynes) is bad news. Maybe not, you think, as Jones and cellist Robin Mason launch into a hilarious rivalry of arrogant arpeggios and musical one-upmanship full of vaudeville panache. But the ending, within arms-length of the audience, is properly honest. Impressive and inspired on every level, and now on tour across Scotland.