

Dark heart of Highlands



Picture Gary Anthony
Melissa Paterson (in wheelchair) and Emma Anderson, writer and stars of Skinnydip's production 'Working Holiday'.

Drama

NORTH actresses Emma Anderson and Melissa Paterson are not content to just wait around for work.

Thanks to the opportunity presented by innovative lunch time drama slot Play Pieces, the pair are putting words in their own mouths with their first ever play "Working Holiday" at The Ironworks tomorrow afternoon.

"Working Holiday" also fits well into the Play Pieces remit for original and challenging work reflecting the contemporary Highlands.

In a story quite literally drawn from the headlines of a local newspaper, it follows best friends Ellie (Anderson) and Claire (Paterson) as they move from their tiny rural hometown to the bright lights of Inverness.

There demanding wheelchair-bound Claire becomes obsessed with reinventing herself by escaping on an adventure holiday. Inspired by reading news of a local "vice-den" raid, she decides to open a brothel to fund her escape. The real life newspaper story about a Highland brothel provided the two novice playwrights with the elements they needed for what will be the second play in the Play Pieces season — strong roles for two females and a story that was local.

"We are very much about writing something that is quite dynamic, contemporary and definitely challenging," Paterson added.

"My character is quite loud and controlling, very demanding and quite cruel to Emma's character Ellie. Emma's character is shy, quiet and quite obedient. They are quite different characters for both of us."

Helping them develop both the characters and play is Chris Lee from Moray company Wildbird, which is co-producing the play with the duo's own newly created company SkinnyDip Theatre.

Having worked with both Paterson and Anderson on Wildbird's adaptation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer

Night's Dream" earlier this year, Lee is directing the play and full of praise for his young collaborators for making his job a relatively easy one.

"They've done such an excellent job. If it had been a poor script it would have been different and I would have been doing lots of re-writing," he said.

"It does work and does everything you want it to. It is funny, that's the first thing, but it is also dramatic and dark in places, which we want as well. I think people will find it fun."

Given the subject matter, Lee expects this to be one Play Pieces offering more sensitive theatre goers might want to avoid, though he did warn: "Some people will sit up straighter at various bits."

Inverness-raised Anderson, who will re-unite with Lee on the play "Dark Matter" in the autumn, agreed it could be hard for an actor in the Highlands because opportunities were limited and both she and Paterson are grateful for the opportunity offered by Play Pieces.

"We wanted to expose the dark heart of the Highlands," she said.

"I think this play would go down well in Glasgow and other places, but within the play we mention the Kessock Bridge and a certain nightclub, so local audiences are going to get a bit more out of it. But we are hoping to keep going with the play and develop it further."

■ "Working Holiday", written and performed by Emma Anderson and Melissa Paterson, is performed at The Ironworks tomorrow at 1.30pm.

The play includes mature language and sexual references.

Tickets include lunch from local butchers MacDougall & Hastie with vegetarian options supplied by social enterprise cafe Artysans.

Any food leftover will be donated to Crossreach, a charity providing care for single, vulnerable people from the ages of 16 to 65 years.