

Press Cuttings
Bend It Like Beckham
26th June 2015

DAILY EXPRESS

Theatre

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM: THE MUSICAL ★★★★★

Phoenix Theatre
until October
Tickets: 0843 3161082

GURINDER Chadha's show based on her hit film is more than a story about female footballers. It is about the shifting shape of British multi-culturalism, the bending of attitudes from one generation to the next, teenage sexuality and gender.

It is also one of sunniest, funniest musicals I have seen in many a year. It shoots. It scores.

Talking of scores, composer Howard Goodall doesn't really get going until 20 minutes into the first half. The opening

numbers sound like generic musical guff and the stage doesn't really catch fire until walloping bhangra dance number Look At Us Now / Golden Moment / Get Me.

Set in Southall in 2001 it is now almost a nostalgia piece. Jess (Natalie Dew) is a young Indian girl with a talent for football. Her traditional Sikh parents wonder why she isn't shopping, marrying and having her nails done. Then there's her friendship with white girl Jules (Lauren Samuels) whose divorced cougarish mum Paula (Sophie-Louise Dann) thinks there might be something funny going on between them.

When Jess joins the local team and starts

leading a secret life as a footballer, the clash between traditional values, family loyalties and gender elements heat up like naan in a tandoor oven.

Then Joe (Jamie-Campbell-Bower), the sad-eyed manager of the team and a white boy no less, finds himself terribly attracted to the new girl. It's complicated.

Chadha reweaves her screenplay into a musical tapestry that gets tighter and brighter as it goes along.

The ensemble dance number that opens the second half is viscerally exciting, with respect to choreographer Aletta Collins - and the casting is perfect.

Get your kit on and go.

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