

Press Cuttings
Bend It Like Beckham
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An end-to-end joy, the girl done great!

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM, THE MUSICAL

Phoenix Theatre

★★★★★

WE went well into extra time at last night's opening of *Bend It Like Beckham*, but no one minded.

Britain's newest musical – and yes, how wonderfully, life-affirmingly, 21st century British it is – turns out to be like the best sort of FA cup match: end-to-end entertainment, full of feisty shimmers and heart-stopping melodrama.

This show, based on the 2002 film comedy, is about a teenage British Sikh girl being torn between the traditional Indian culture of her family and her great love – football. Jess has posters of David Beckham in her bedroom. The show opens with her dreaming of scoring the winning World Cup goal for



Quentin Letts
first night review



Excellent:
Natalie Dew

England. We even have a John Motson commentary of the great moment.

Here is a good old tussle between West and East, family and friends, old and new. Throw in some ace music – richly orchestrated, hummable tunes – by Howard Goodall and witty lyrics by Charles Hart.

Natalie Dew is excellent as Jess, the slightly plain, possibly bitch younger sister of Pinky (Preeya Kalidas). Pinky is engaged to a respectable Indian boy but Jess's footballing decadence endangers that marriage because

the snooty prospective in-laws take fright. But Jess knows better. She finds her metier, and friendship, with the Hounslow Harriers, a women's football team skippered by Jules (Lauren Samuels, well cast).

The Harriers are coached by handsome Joe (Jamie Campbell Bower). All that stands between Jess and her footballing freedom is her strict parents. Finally the father (Tony Jayawardena) relents. Sobs all round.

Okay, it is all more than a touch soupy. The plot may never win trophies for sophistica-

tion. The stage may at times become as crowded as the home team's goalmouth at Hereford United (RIP alas).

But the sheer fun of it is irresistible and it can legitimately claim to have a social message about the importance of minorities assimilating and allowing their young to find their own paths in modern Britain. That may mean bending a football or bending a few of the old-world rules.

Some of the songs – *Tough Love*, *There She Goes*, *Glorious* – will surely find a life beyond the stage. Comic relief comes from Sophie-Louise Dann as Jules's mother ('40-something, fit but fellowless') and there is no shortage of Southall bling.

The football shooting could be more vigorous but we do, near the end, have the delicious sight of a Victoria Beckham lookalike doing some keepy-uppy.

On me 'ead, Posh. Back of the net!