

Press Cuttings
Bend It Like Beckham
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Bend It Like Beckham musical review: She shoots, she scores!

The task of transforming a popular movie into a stage musical is a tough challenge that has brought successes (*Billy Elliot*), and disappointments (*Made in Dagenham*), so **Gurinder Chadha**'s idea of bringing her 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* to the West End was an intriguing one.

The majority of the feel and the plot of the original film remains in the musical. Set in suburban west London, it focuses on Jess, who worships David Beckham and has a desire to play football that doesn't fit in with her Punjabi Indian parents' plans.



Bend It Like Beckham: The Musical

She secretly plays for her local women's football team and soon falls in love with coach Joe, which creates a difficult love triangle with her best friend Jules, a role which helped transform Keira Knightley into an international star.

The film's musical leaning lends itself well for a musical adaptation, and composer Howard Goodall and lyricist Charles Hart have created several excellent numbers that tell the story of Jess's difficult situation, putting across a perfect mixture of humour and contemplation.



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The musical starts off with a slightly cheesy and forced number about Southall's "glitter and noise" and multi-cultural areas, but with each song and each scene, it keeps getting stronger and turns into a genuinely excellent British triumph.

The staging is stunning, from Neil Austin's lighting, Katrina Lindsay's costumes and Miriam Buether's sets. Everything is bright, colourful and intelligent, and there are even impressive moments involving footballs and a stand-in David Beckham.



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Goodall has brilliantly mixed Bhangra and pop to create a luscious musical landscape that makes you want to get up on your feet, while also having moments of genuinely beautiful performances from singers Shahid Khan and Rekha Sawhney.

Aletta Collins's choreography is very smart in the way that the show mixes both the Indian families and the football team all at once, fusing the two stories and cultures in a way that is bright and powerful.



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Natalie Dew is perfect for the innocent and excitable Jess, while Lauren Samuels plays Jules with an air of power and passion. Hollywood star Jamie Campbell Bower makes his West End debut with ease as Joe and fits in perfectly alongside the brilliant performances of Sophie-Louise Dann as Paula, Tony Jayawardena as Mr Bhamra, Natasha Jayetileke as Mrs Bhamra and Preeya Kalidas as Pinky.

It has to be said that some of the best moments are during the speaking parts between the songs, and it is genuinely laugh-out-loud funny on many occasions. However, the songs do provide another way of telling the colourful story that was first told 13 years ago.



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You don't need to be a fan of the original film or football to enjoy this musical. It might seem a bit odd for the first 10 minutes, but once you let yourself in for the ride, you're sure to love this bright spectacle. Gurinder Chadha has scored again.



Bend It Like Beckham will be staged at London's Phoenix Theatre until October 24.