

Press Cuttings
Bend It Like Beckham
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http://londonist.com/2015/06/back-of-the-net-for-bend-it-like-beckham-review.php?utm_campaign=coschedule&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=Londonist&utm_content=Back%20Of%20The%20Net%20For%20Bend%20It%20Like%20Beckham%20--%20Review

Back Of The Net For Bend It Like Beckham — Review



Londonist Rating: ★★★★★

This is the one where critics who spend most of their time in the theatre show off their football knowledge. In our case, it won't take long. In fact one of the best things about [Bend It Like Beckham](#) is that you don't have to give a referee's toss about the beautiful game, and you don't need to have seen the 2002 movie.

It's an easy surface story of kid-wants-to-do-what-the-parents-don't; the parallels between Sikh-girl-playing-football here, and Geordie-lad-doing-ballet [Billy Elliot](#) are so direct, there's even a [standard GCSE question on their comparative stereotyping](#). Jesminder's parents are as blinkered in their 'traditional Indian family' thinking as is Billy's dad by miners' solidarity and what his mates in the social club would say.

Both shows share the optimism that social progress comes with breaking free from restrictive heritage. You could argue that by equally celebrating and critiquing the British Indian family, it is quite finger-on-the-pulse of current migration and integration debate.

But mostly, Gurinder Chadha's production is an upbeat fusion of conventional stage musical, choral anthem and Slumdog-derived Bollywood dance which for once doesn't feel calculated to appeal to the X-Factor market. There's consistent plotting and an interesting musical mix which features the brave inclusion of a sentimental Punjabi wedding song. Because of the extravagant orchestrations, and seamless integration of Howard Goodall's rich and eclectic score with Charles Hart's unforced lyrics, this may be the breakthrough New British Screen-to-Stage Musical that succeeds, where — despite big budgets and good writing pedigrees — [Betty Blue Eyes](#) and [Made in Dagenham](#) failed.

Natalie Dew as Jess and Lauren Samuels as the Sapphic-suspect captain of the Hounslow Harriers Jules share the acting honours and probably an Olivier nomination, but there are also outstanding contributions by Jamal Andréas as Jess's secretly-gay confidant Tony, and most impressive of all Tony Jayawardena as Jess's father Mr Bhamra whose beautifully-written and impeccably-rendered ballad People Like Us encapsulates the pride, patience and resilience of a worthy man tagged with a migrant label.

Perhaps carried away on Aletta Collins' tidal wave of Bhangra choreography, the show overruns its advertised time by about 25 minutes: the second act needs some structural work to avoid a succession of false endings. But even if the wedding scene has all the costume, trappings and fairy lights of a pantomime finale, its exuberance is completely infectious. That it celebrates 21st century multiculturalism too is just the cherry on the chapati.

Bend It Like Beckham continues at the Phoenix Theatre for an open-ended run. Currently booking to 24 October 2015. Tickets £15-£90 from the official [ATG website](#). Londonist saw this show on a complimentary ticket.