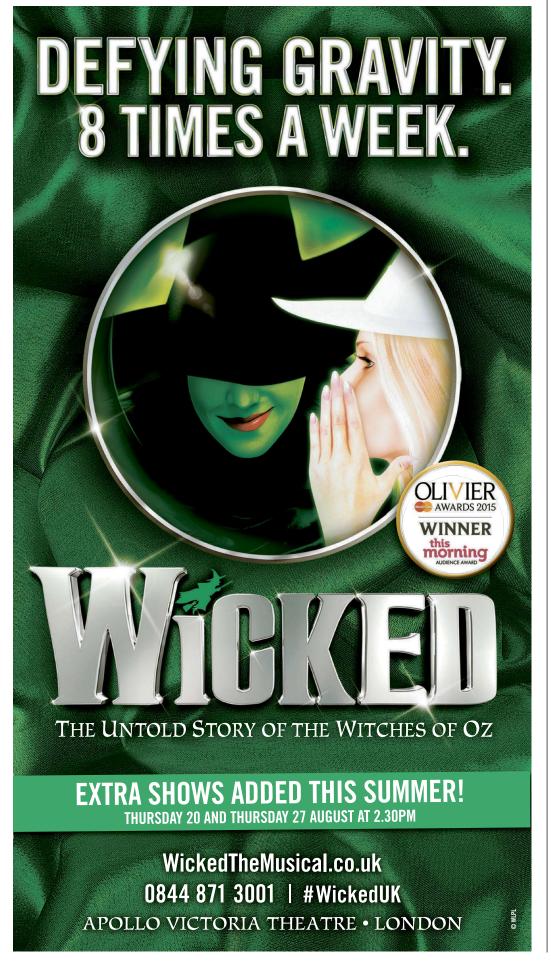




Bend It Like Beckham

Phoenix Theatre, London Until October 24, 2hrs 30mins





She Goes has Jess's conservative Indian

mother at one with the fortysome-

thing, man-eating mum of Jess's foot-

baller friend Jules on the subject of

OK, so composer Howard Goodall's

score and Charles Hart's lyrics are

Championship rather than Premier

League but the best songs, Bend It

('Rules aren't there to be broken but

to be bent') and Glorious, keep the

narrative ball in the air with great flair.

As does a fabulous dance number in

letting go of their daughters.

Jess to get her moustache waxed. All Mr Bhamra – a Sikh from East Africa, working at Heathrow wants is for his girls to be happy.

Director Matthew Dunster's risky but occasionally remarkable revival of Chekhov's marvellous early play about thinking and acting (in every sense), frustration and failure, gives the audience simultaneously a full frontal and a seagull's view of the action, with the help of a vast tilted mirror stretching above and across the stage.

It both emphasises the way the characters take themselves so seriously (some more

expands the play's references

consciously than others), putting on a show and making a scene, and their relative insignificance, absurdity and irrelevance in the larger scheme of things.

to Shakespeare's Hamlet, and ups the comedy as well as the tragedy Some of Dunster's flourishes work better than others: the characters' soliloquies and

We're in Southall, west London,

in 2001, where the idea of 'Girl Perfect'

(the title of one of this musical's songs)

is different for everyone, depending on

their experience, age, gender, dreams

and culture - which is why they are

The show is very funny. 'She's hot,

innit,' says Teetu about his fiancee

Pinky (show-stealing Preeva Kalidas,

out there in every sense). 'She's not a

cup of tea,' tuts his snooty mother.

Pinky is certainly not *her* cup of tea.

all at odds with one another.

asides emerge as voiceovers, the dramatic equivalent of thought-bubbles. Never more wittily than when Janie Dee – gorgeously ghastly as the middle-aged actress and monster mother, Arkadina desperately smothers her lover, Trigorin, with undeserved flattery, in order to win him back when young Nina catches his wandering eye. 'Got him!'

But it's also poignant. The song *There* which the Hounslow Harriers stretch,

Dee is a delight, absurdly insisting that she looks more youthful than a woman half her age, leaping extravagantly to show off her girlish flexibility. Indeed, Dunster draws some carefully judged and detailed performances from a fine cast, especially Lisa Diveney's desperate Masha, failing to

says her inner voice.

dry doctor, Dorn. But while a loudly vibrating

wave of elation.

tuning fork powerfully underscores the doomy moments, the rumbling chords registering an emotional climax seem crude and unnecessary. The squawking heron that happened to pass by, bang on cue, was far

Georgina Brown

The Trial Young Vic, London Until August 22, 2hrs ****

Natasha

Javetileke

Bend It Like

Beckham.

scene from

THEATRE



The Ordeal would be a better title. Two hours, no interval, no escape. Even if you did a runner, you'd trip over the stage, which is an airport travelator strip. Down this the set travels like luggage bed, lamp, doors, actors.

The story – adapted by Nick Gill – is based on the Franz Kafka 1925 novel which looked into the future and predicted Stalin and Hitler's world. Thus Josef K, a bank vicepresident, finds himself under arrest but not allowed to know the charges. Rory Kinnear (Mr K, above), in his sweating furtiveness, reminded me of his dad, the late, great Roy Kinnear. But this version has no real sense of time or place, despite a few nice contemporary touches.

The update is over-directed by Richard Jones, though Kate O'Flynn (in various roles) and Sian Thomas (as the sleek lawyer) are both excellent. Kafka's vision is a nightmare that's circular and unending. This captive evening feels much the same.

Robert Gore-Langton

The Seagull

Regent's Park Open Air Until July 11, 2hrs 30mins ****

Torben Betts's salty, peppery, idiomatic new adaptation intriguingly sharpens and

drown her misery in buckets of drink, and Danny Webb's

swerve and expertly do keepy-uppies.

The real achievement, however, is in

the balance and tight interweaving

of Eastern and Western attitudes,

traditional and street sounds, and dif-

fering dancing styles. The show-

stopping wedding reception combines

the footballers marking and shooting

in the all-important match with the

beat. Empowering and exhilarating,

you'll float out of the theatre on a

It's a girls' *Billy Elliot* set to a bhangra

guests whirling in sparkling saris.