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**GEORGINA BROWN**  
**SHOW OF THE WEEK**

**Bend It Like Beckham**  
Phoenix Theatre, London  
Until October 24, 2hrs 30mins  
★★★★★

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ELLIE KURTZ/DONALD COOPER/TRISTRAM KENTON

**G**urinder Chadha's gloriously theatrical version of her original 2002 movie doesn't merely recycle it but revitalises it, deepening the characters, sharpening the humour and creating a joyous celebration of multicultural Britain, girl power, spirited teens and team spirit.

Mrs Bhamra wants her daughter to learn how to cook an aloo gobi and be the perfect prospective daughter-in-law, but tomboy, soccer-mad Jess (a touching, open-hearted Natalie Dew) wants to bend it like Beckham.

Primped, preened and pushed-up sister Pinky wants 'butch brigade' 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.



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

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

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

expands the play's references 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 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!' says her inner voice.

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



Janie Dee and Matthew Tennyson in *The Seagull*

drown her misery in buckets of drink, and Danny Webb's dry doctor, Dorn.

But while a loudly vibrating 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 more effective.

Georgina Brown

## BECKHAM SCORES AGAIN!

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 all at odds with one another.

The show is very funny. 'She's hot, innit,' says Teetu about his fiancée Pinky (show-stealing Preeya 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.

But it's also poignant. The song *There*

*She Goes* has Jess's conservative Indian mother at one with the fortysomething, man-eating mum of Jess's footballer friend Jules on the subject of letting go of their daughters.

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 which the Hounslow Harriers stretch,

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 differing dancing styles. The show-stopping wedding reception combines the footballers marking and shooting in the all-important match with the guests whirling in sparkling saris.

It's a girls' *Billy Elliot* set to a bhangra beat. Empowering and exhilarating, you'll float out of the theatre on a wave of elation.



Preeya Kalidas, far right, in *Bend It Like Beckham*. Below: Lauren Samuels and Natalie Dew



Left: Natasha Jayetileke as Mrs Bhamra in *Bend It Like Beckham*. Above: the Hounslow Harriers in a scene from the show



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



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 vice-president, 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