The Review Theatre

GLASGOW GIRLS CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY CORA BISSETT

Presented by the National Theatre of Scotland, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Citizens Theatre, Pachamama Productions, Richard Jordan Productions Ltd in association with Merrigong Theatre Company, Australia

If you try to find Drumchapel High School on Google Maps, you will find that you also get told that it looms near the bottom of the academic league tables. The one internet review beside it says that it's a 'shite skool'. So much for internet reviews, so much for our abilities to measure what often matters more. I live and work a mere mile from Drumchapel High and I never knew a thing about the Glasgow Girls, the bunch of schoolgirls who decided that they wanted to defend their friends — who were asylum seekers, under threat of deportation.

Gallus and tender, this is the show to see if you have ever felt powerless, fatigued by bureaucracy, or alone in your struggle. The humour is acute: we are told it's not going to be a show with political drama and glamour but more a show that is 'more about photocopying'.

Cast left to right: Amaka Okafor, Frances Thorburn, Dawn Sievwright, Roanna Davidson, Patricia Panther, Stephanie McGregor, and Amiera Darwish.

Credit: Simon Murphy

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There are jokes about Edinburgh, football, and IRN-BRU, and audience-appreciated impressions of Tommy Sheridan. Then there is dancing: dancing, which is witty and zesty and often, especially in the mash-up with choreography drawn from multiple cultures, moving.

The lightness of touch does not detract from the depth of the story. The girls' teacher, Euan Girvan, has a classful of children to teach English as a foreign language to, and allows himself to be swept up with his pupils' desire to do something useful. And then there is Noreen, whom GPs up and down the land will recognise, as a 'wee wimmin' whose personal modesty disguises her enormous strengths: dependability, courage, and a quiet moral outrage turned to practical use. She'd keep watch for the dawn patrols of the Home Office deportation teams, and if they were seen at 5 am, driving down with handcuffs at the ready, would phone her asylum seeker neighbours in the blocks of flats and tell them to leave immediately.

I felt proud to recognise Noreen as the kind of unsung national heroine we all know the like of. But I'm embarrassed, not just about not knowing of the girls' campaign, but also by the kindness and generosity of people who were willing to do so much despite, often, not having much themselves. We are each other's neighbour. I will try to do better.

Margaret McCartney,
GP, Glasgow.

Glasgow Girls ran from 31 October to 17 November 2012 at the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow, supported by ScottishPower, and will be presented at Theatre Royal Stratford East, London in Spring 2013.

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NATIONAL TREASURES

Three new plays that recently opened at the National Theatre should appear on your to do list for 2013. Lucy Prebble came to prominence with *Enron*, in which video projection, geometric lighting, and choreography were blended with naturalistic dialogue to track the mechanisms of the financial scandal surrounding the bankruptcy of the American energy company. Again working with the director Rupert Goold, Prebble employs similar techniques in *The Effect* to depict a tightly-monitored trial of a new antidepressant in normal volunteers conducted in a pharma company facility. Two subjects, played by Billie Piper and Jonjo O'Neill, are attracted to each other, but are their emotions drug-induced or 'real'? And who is on placebo, and who is on the active drug? And whose functional MRI scans are we looking at? Do antidepressants work anyway, and what lies beneath the surfaces of the buttoned-down trial monitor and the plausible pharma medic? It's worth finding out.

Alan Bennett is a real national treasure and his new play *People* is, as someone sitting behind me pronounced, 'very Alan Bennett'. It is, as always, engaging, witty, and mischievous in its portrayal of the decay of a stately home and its inhabitants, beautifully played by the wonderful Frances de la Tour and Linda Bassett. De la Tour — Lady Stacpoole — has a gay archdeacon

Billie Piper as Connie and Jonjo O'Neill as Tristan. THE EFFECT by Lucy Prebble. A co-production between the National Theatre and Headlong.

Photo: Ellie Kurtz