

STEP Young Critics Programme

The STEP Young Critics Programme 2011 offered young people from The Charter School in Southwark the chance to work with a professional journalist (Andrew Dickson, *The Guardian*) to learn the skills needed to be a theatre critic. Participants in the Programme saw at least two shows at a STEP partner theatre (Unicorn Theatre, Half Moon Young People's Theatre, the Young Vic, Theatre Local in Peckham and the Blue Elephant Theatre).

This was a great opportunity for the young people to develop their writing skills, learn to be critical observers and interact with industry professionals. They were also able to tell the theatres what they think of the shows which are created with them in mind.



The STEP Young Critics Programme is funded by the Financial Times, a long-standing STEP corporate partner. STEP would especially like to thank Tom Glover and Emily Gibbs for their support of STEP and the Young Critics Programme.

Special thanks also to the theatres involved in the Programme and Andrew for his commitment to the young people who may be the next generation of theatre critics.

STEP creates many opportunities for Southwark's young people to access theatre and performing arts activities across the borough.

The 2011 Festival, *STEP Out Loud*, which the Young Critics Programme 2011 was part of, has enabled young people in Southwark to access activities in their schools and local theatre venues.

For more information on how to get involved with STEP visit our website, find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter:

www.step-partnership.co.uk

Southwark Theatres

@STEPSouthwark

For more information on the theatres involved in the Young Critics Programme 2011:

Blue Elephant Theatre

Box Office: 020 7701 0100
www.blueelephanttheatre.co.uk

Half Moon Young People's Theatre

Box Office: 020 7709 8900
www.halfmoon.org.uk

Southwark Playhouse

Box Office: 020 7407 0234
www.southwarkplayhouse.co.uk

Unicorn Theatre

Box Office: 020 7645 0560
www.unicorntheatre.com

Young Vic

Box Office: 020 7922 2922
www.youngvic.org

STEP Young Critics Programme 2011

part of the STEP Out Loud Festival

Hamlet
Young Vic Theatre

The Snow Queen
Unicorn Theatre

The Westbridge
Theatre Local

Danny and the Deep Blue Sea
Southwark Playhouse

**Reviews by students at
The Charter School**

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Danny and the Deep Blue Sea, Southwark Playhouse Wilson Kiiru

John Patrick Shanley's 1983 play is a love story unlike most. When the two main characters, Danny and Roberta, make conversation with each other in a bar, it is clear that their relationship is going to be full of trouble; a dangerous and mysterious love story that grabs you from the start.

Roberta, who is 31 years old, lives with her mother, father and teenage son in the Bronx. The fact that she is not particularly close to her parents means that she spends most of her time out and where she doesn't need to think about her daily struggles. Danny, 29, is more like a lone wolf in the play. When he first meets Roberta at the bar, he had just had a fight in which he thought he "killed the guy". There are many times in the play in which you feel that Danny is someone who is quite alone.

The play was performed at the well-known Southwark Playhouse. When you are inside the theatre it almost feels as though you are in a cave or even a Second World War bunker. This environment sets an atmosphere of mystery and complements the play very well. So in terms of location, it is probably the best place to do the play. It isn't the biggest of theatres; however when there are only two actors performing it, it is the perfect size.

The actors, Clare Latham and Jonathan Chambers, do well to maintain their accents and they communicate the characters' emotions consistently throughout the entire play. *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* is a play well worth seeing; however it is mostly recommended for those 16+ as it does contain some adult humour.



The Snow Queen, The Unicorn Theatre Kyra Ansine



The Snow Queen is a new exciting piece, which is a Bollywood version of the original fairytale. The original fairytale was written by Hans Christian Anderson in 1845. It tells of the struggle between good and evil with the main characters of a little boy and girl.

As you arrive into the theatre, you immediately feel the Indian presence, as the stairs that go up towards the theatre, are adorned with typical Indian flowers and ornaments. I started to feel excited even though I'm old enough now not to entirely believe in fairytales. The set was very imaginative and kept you engaged at all times. The flooring was designed in the shape of the southern tip of India, where the play is set. The make-shift painted sea, around the edge of the flooring, had loads of the smaller children playing with it. There were seats at the fore-stage, which were typical Indian-style cushions, on the floor, for the children to sit on.

The Bollywood version is very imaginative, as it is completely unnatural for India to get any snow, nevertheless any form of cold weather as it is situated on the equator. So after there is a freak snowstorm in the south of India, one of the main characters, Kumar, disappears after going off with the Snow Queen. Kumar had previously disbelieved Parti, after she told him and his best friend Gowri about the mythical story of the Snow Queen. When Gowri finds out about the capture of Kumar, she desperately tries to find him and goes on a long quest to find and save him.



The actors were all brilliant. They were fun and exciting. There were no child actors, but most of them were quite young. This did have an effect on the interpretation of the play, and made it feel a little bit

older than its target audience. I also do feel that if there were a few child actors it would have made the children relate to the play a little more. I also do however feel, the use of acting out some of the story as though it was a "traditional Hollywood" love story, didn't appeal to a lot of the kids, even though they only kissed on the cheek. It was however quite amusing for them even though the general audience couldn't quite grasp the idea and concept of it. There was about six or seven characters throughout the play and all but two of the characters played more than one role. I didn't feel this was very effective, for the type of audience they were aiming for because, it did seem as though it could be quite confusing for the 7 year olds. It worked in some parts, but I do feel they could have had more characters to play the different roles. The style of language used however was very clear, and very understandable.



There was also humour that meant that the parents could have a laugh as well as the children. The music that is used within this play is the traditional Bollywood music. With the famous "chana" rhythms that make you want to get up and dance.

The play not only left a smile on the children's faces, but both mine and the adults' faces as well. You not only get to learn a little bit about Indian culture, but you get to have fun at the same time. It is very upbeat and very lively, constantly in your face and one of the best plays I've seen so far, because of its fun twist and adaptation of the original fairytale "The Snow Queen".

Hamlet, Young Vic
Lily Campbell



Ian Rickson's production of *Hamlet* takes a fresh look at the play. Set in an asylum you are immediately drawn into the soulful yet hostile character of Hamlet, and we are troubled throughout with the decision that if what we're watching is reality or illusion. The text itself is original and engaging, the cast manage to add incredible essence to the words that are being spoken and often, even make the language sound modern.

When watching there is a constant feel of unease. With the lights often plunging the audience into pitch blackness, and alarms going off, you feel that anything can happen – that you yourself as an audience member are threatened by the same dangers that Hamlet is haunted by.

Sheen's take on Hamlet is refreshing. The character is a vortex of emotions, ranging from manic to charming. Sheen commands the stage as Hamlet providing a lucid and energetic take on the classic part. As an audience we make an instant connection to the character, you forget the traditional story of Hamlet and we were simply thrown into this exceptional piece of theatre. Sheen manages to display the idea that Hamlet is insane, but there is still that humanity that draws the audience to him every time he is on stage.

Vinette Robinson is deeply moving as Ophelia. Her performance in the first half wasn't as impressive – she lacked the depth that the character needed – however, when she came back after her father had been killed, Robinson's performance was enchanting. When reciting mournful songs composed by PJ Harvey, her performance was almost ghostly and truly believable.

The stage is covered with ugly carpet and dotted with plastic chairs. Filing cabinets line the walls. Metal doors sometimes judder noisily, reinforcing the sense of a high-security enclosure. Shoes with laces have to be abandoned and visitors must wear shower sandals.

The costumes the actors wear are timeless, it's difficult to pick a precise time in history that the play is set.

This is perfect for the piece, because the play itself has been repeated and worked on so many times, and even though Sheen is following many big names before him like David Tennant and Jude Law, the performance feels completely original, without losing the feeling of the play.

It is Sheen's performance that is embedded in our memory. His ability to change his emotions so rapidly between scenes provides the audience with a constant change of emotion. Sheen is a dangerous and controversial Hamlet, one that will be hard to forget.

Hamlet, Young Vic
Daniel Levey



It was Shakespeare's last play, but with a definite twist. Director Ian Rickson, Designer Jeremy Herbert and superlative actor Michael Sheen have brought a very different Hamlet to the Young Vic stage and, for me, it works perfectly. It's not often that you enter a theatre by a completely different route – the walk to the auditorium was rather disconcerting and quite surreal – and I couldn't quite work out what was going on, but as soon as the production started, I perfectly understood. I was pleasantly surprised and delighted.

Even within the pre-stage tour all the actors kept in character and this set the scene for the play perfectly, and this made me think that this was a play worth watching. The play began and all was revealed. If no one has set Hamlet in a present day mental hospital before, one wonders why not, for it actually makes perfect sense and illustrates so well the age old question, is it all in Hamlet's mind?

Mind you, the whole effect is helped by the fact that Michael Sheen is quite brilliant. He captures all the mental torment, presenting the man with warmth, torment, sadness, anger making him totally and utterly believable. I've read that he "is increasingly repulsed by acting", meaning acting as opposed to reacting and he certainly practices what he preaches. Another bonus is that he speaks the lines so wonderfully that there were times when I felt the script had been updated; no need to concentrate to understand the meaning here, everything is perfectly clear.

I also hugely enjoyed the performances by Vinette Robinson as Ophelia, Michael Gould as Polonius and James Clyde as Claudius, whilst not quite understanding the decision to make Horatio and Rosencrantz female and casting Benedict Wong as Laertes. For me, it didn't quite work but, no matter, everything else hit the spot and I was captivated as soon as I entered the shabby auditorium, complete with basketball net! The moments of high drama, surprising technical effects and complete black outs, kept me in that state right to the very end.

No need to compare this version of *Hamlet* with the recent high profile productions starring Jude Law and David Tennant. This production has received very mixed reviews, which really surprises me. I just thought it was brilliant. Okay, so it's not a production I'd recommend if you've never seen *Hamlet* before or don't know the play at all. However with a play over 400 years old it's important that there are productions out there that push the boundaries and make you see it in a new light, and that's exactly what this one does. It stands alone.

It may have been a three hour production but due to the high level of acting it didn't feel long at all the beauty of this version is that it kept me guessing. The props and the stage that in the end was lifted up above our heads was breathtaking. I went into the play thinking I wasn't going to enjoy it but after seeing it I would really recommend anyone to go and see this production. It was a huge privilege to see this play.

Danny and the Deep Blue Sea, Southwark Playhouse
Lily Hale

John Shanley's script *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, performed at the magnificent Southwark Playhouse, brings you into a deserted New York pub at the beginning of something truly brilliant. Originally written in 1983, this play doesn't fail to capture your attention with clever staging and an insightful take on the only two characters in the play – Roberta and Danny. Danny, an angry and frustrated man, sits in a lonely bar, covered in blood from a previous fight. Here he meets Roberta, a young mother with a troubled past who carries a deep secret with her. After they try and figure each other out, we see that there is clear chemistry between the two outcasts. Challenging each other mentally, physically and emotionally, both the characters and the audience see similarities.

You begin to see a relationship blossom when they start pouring their heart out to each other. However unlike the typical love story, the two verbally abuse each other through the scene. The brutality of this overshadows what would be a gentle scene but you still see the growing relationship between them. You feel compassionate towards characters who seem hard - which seems impossible at the start. Danny confides in Roberta over his wrong doings and eventually Roberta reveals her dark secret that she has kept since she was a child. Danny seems unfazed by her confession which displays the mutual understanding of each other and their disturbing pasts forming. The two go back to Roberta's house where they forget about their worries and dream about the future together. Here we see just how much they both need each other. Despite the messed up mind they both possess, there are moments in the play, although very few, that show their softer caring sides. For example Roberta lashes out at Danny and, uncharacteristically, he doesn't fight back while she delivers slaps to his bare chest. We see the softer side in Roberta when they both sit down and talk 'romantically'.

The venue, Southwark Playhouse, provides a small, intimate space where you are surrounding the actors in a box shape. The lighting and sound for the play was kept very minimalistic, as was the use of props. For example one minute the two are lying on Roberta's bed and then, in the same spot, they stand looking out of the imaginary window. Surprisingly this was very effective and the clever idea represented Danny and the free souls at that moment having found each other. The idea allowed the audience to fully focus on the meaning behind the story although additional lighting and sound may have added depth and variation to the simplistic set. Where lighting was used, it was used to great avail in presenting the change of scene. An example of this is when Roberta and Danny go from the bar to her bedroom. There is a short blackout and then the room is lit dimly with a small purple-ish light representing the moon outside.

The director, Che Walker, balances the comedic elements of the script with the dark and harrowing lines that change the whole atmosphere within the Playhouse. The acting from Clare Latham (Roberta) and Jonathan Chambers (Danny) displays sheer brilliance. The two put everything into their performance and it is clear to see that their characterisation is of a very high quality. Their performances had everything needed to play their characters with pure conviction from accurate accents, to their body language and shared chemistry. This unlikely love story sees two complex and troubled personalities seek to find happiness within each other. An insightful and uniquely heartwarming tale, a must-see.

Danny and the Deep Blue Sea, Southwark Playhouse **Bobbi-Jay Crook**

Danny and the Deep Blue Sea is the compelling love story between two social outcasts: Danny and Roberta. Set in New York's The Bronx, we begin in a deserted, brightly lit bar. When a strong-headed New York "Dall" strikes up conversation with a blood-stained, bruised knuckled meathead, our immediate reaction to the two is that any chance of any type relationship is clearly doomed.

Roberta – a sleazy 31-year-old – still lives at home with her mother, father and teenage "crazy" son. She feels trapped in her life and unable to escape due to a dark incident she fails to share with anyone. One failed marriage later she comes across sarcastic, bold and looking for company. On the other side of the spectrum, Danny doesn't want anything to do with anyone. When he comes into the bar and almost beats a guy to death for asking where he was going, it's almost impossible to see a softer side within his character.

Remarkably these characters are pulled together by their differences and together realise how lonely both actually are. An unlikely romance begins.

The actors, Clare Latham as Roberta and Jonathan Chambers as Danny, are truly amazing. A rocky start left me unconvinced about their abilities and confused about what accents they were trying to portray. However five minutes into the play you will truly be gripped by their natural effortless performance.

Southwark Playhouse provides an abstract venue for this naturalistic play. Set in an old railway tunnel the venue actually provides the perfect setting for this atmospheric play. When the two actors deliver their ongoing shouting matches the tunnel amplifies each individual sound, so it's as if the words are being screamed directly at you. One sound that stood out for me was when Roberta was continuously slapping Danny's bare chest, each slap was so loud it made me shudder and almost feel every hit.

The audience was sat in the round; between us was a small rectangular acting space, with two metal bar stools the only props. When first confronted with the acting space you felt nervous and intimidated by the intimacy the audience had with the actors. However as the play went on, you could really feel the effectiveness of the way you were seated. It made you feel as if you were actually in the play yourself, with shoes almost hitting people in the front row.

The props being minimalist allowed you to fully focus on the actors and the amazing dialogue of the play. It also emphasises the actor's performance: when Danny and Roberta were intimate the cold floor boards left little to the audience's imagination. Lighting also underwent small changes however was deeply effective in signalling hope. For example, when Roberta talks about how pretty the moon is, the lighting changes to a deep purple tone – to me this was a symbol of hope and beauty in the darkest situations, which ultimately I think the play expresses.

What's remarkable about this play is that nothing much really happens. The two get talking and spend the night together. But it's the quality of the dialogue that really makes it utterly compelling: harsh sentences like "I think I killed a guy last night". Ultimately the play shows us how no matter how hard life is there's always a way out, and a way to make things better. Through these two misfits this play will leave you with a touched heart and most definitely a sense of hope.

Hamlet, Young Vic **Maxim Ryder**



I have never been a huge fan of Shakespearean plays as I find them difficult to understand verbally and hard to follow. However, Ian Rickson's take on a traditional Shakespearean play may have just converted me.

The setting of *Hamlet* was fantastic. The pre-show journey where the audience were led behind the stage and through a mental institute really set the scene. The actors interpreted workers either cleaning or monitoring behaviour on screens. Everything looked very naturalistic and accurate – it created a really surreal, clinical, mental effect, putting the audience out of their comfort zone. As you entered the stage you found yourself back in the theatre where you took your seats awaiting the next part of your *Hamlet* experience.



The set was also amazing. The glass screen and the huge red doors were brilliant extras for the characters to use and to illustrate how isolated and trapped Hamlet and the asylum are. The doors acted as barriers preventing Hamlet and the audience from seeing what was happening on the inside, shutting the asylum off from society and reality. The stage lifting out and upwards to reveal a sand pit, was one of the main highlights of the play. It took everyone by surprise and added a new dimension to the stage for the audience to see and experience. Ian Rickson and his production team brilliantly devised the stage and set. At times it really felt as though I was trapped with Hamlet in the asylum going mad myself.

The lighting, too, was excellent. The scene where Horatio and the other guards see the ghost of the father for the first time was

excellently showcased by the lights. The use of snappy short glimpses of the lights caught the audience off guard; showing flashes of the dead king at the top of the stage above the audience, then black out, and then he appeared centre stage wielding a dagger! Whilst in the dark you feel scared, lonely and helpless, a lot like Hamlet would have felt when his Uncle took his father's throne.



Michael Sheen was incredible; he was the best theatre actor I have ever seen. The emotion and exertion he puts his body through is inspirational to all young actors. He is a real role model. Actors such as Vinette Robinson and Michael Gould were also outstanding as Ophelia and Polonius. All the actors within the play were excellent; all of them supported each other and were extremely well rehearsed and practised. They all sold the act of being in a mental asylum and really put this across to the audience. A particular scene that stood out was Hamlet's show, featured at the end of Act 1. It added a new dimension of humour with madness to Hamlet's character and Michael Sheen did really well in portraying this whilst the other characters watched in black comedy horror.

Ian Rickson feeds the audience his own interpretation of Hamlet. In setting Hamlet in a mental asylum, instead of a conventional castle, the director effectively illustrates how mad and trapped Hamlet really is. The Mental asylum acts as a barrier that Hamlet can never push past. Hamlet was trapped there by his father and is now trapped there by the love of his mother and the hatred of his Uncle. You start to understand and believe that the mental asylum is not just there to present an alternative setting but to illustrate and demonstrate a metaphorical form for Hamlet's mind. What we start to understand is that the only way for Hamlet to escape the mental asylum, his mind, his paradox, is to die and so be set free.

Hamlet, Young Vic Florence Dessau

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is often described as the best of his plays. Although this is opinion, can Ian Rickson's adaptation sway many more?

Entering the building, as opposed to a justly, swanky bar of people coming straight from work, chattering about what they have heard about Sheen in Hamlet; we take the tour of the asylum. Through narrow corridors. Every detail has been attended to, from a faded non-smoking sign, to the disturbing ushers (or are they actors?). The experience is a thrilling way to enter a theatre. This sets you up for the performance, you are with the characters, and you know it won't be an ordinary Shakespeare play.

A new interpretation of such an old and beloved script was risky, but the risk paid off in Rickson's case. The setting - an asylum - offers a dark atmosphere that is more than appropriate for this Shakespearean tragedy. It almost makes you ponder why people have not thought of this before.

It could be argued that the use of the asylum is too eccentric for such a classic play, but is the public being too prudish when it comes to Shakespeare? How many more traditional performances of *Hamlet* do we need? I believe Rickson is doing the right thing in taking Shakespeare in a new direction. It may be frightening, but it could also open up magical opportunities for hefty plays like this: and I think Britain should run with it. This version of Hamlet is history -in-the-making, and must be witnessed.

Staging by Jeremy Herbert is understated and perfect. The main setting being behind glass doors is just enough to captivate the audience into Hamlet's world and not too much to take away from the outstanding acting on the simple front stage. Then in the second Act, the wonders of theatre are revealed with an amazing surprise,



including the stage lifting up. The most appealing part of this play is obviously the increasingly well recognised Michael Sheen. Sheen has wowed critics in films before. Now this performance takes his reputation to a new level, as he performs one of Shakespeare's most complex characters.

What stuns me most about Sheen's performance as Hamlet is his

ability to turn the troublesome Shakespearean language into a totally accessible part of the performance. This was also helped by Sheen adding comedy into a dark and upsetting play, be it his facial expressions, with a funny one liner, or the entire scene of Hamlet's 'play' which was made comical with the strange use of a vacuum. It was refreshing to hear uproars of laughter from the audience at a Shakespearean tragedy.

Michael Sheen should be celebrated for this performance, he captures everything Hamlet should be and more; frantic, paranoid, but also good-hearted. And most significantly he gives Hamlet a personality.

Aside Sheen is a cast of more exceptional actors. You cannot pinpoint one bad actor in the whole production.

Vinette Robinson's performance of Ophelia was fascinating. In the second Act she shined with a heart-wrenching scene, in a wheelchair singing her pain of her father's death.



Michael Gould strikes gold with his portrayal of this Polonius, who does not have luck on his side in the play, though he never does anything wrong. He is a loving father to Ophelia and Laertes, and again Ian Rickson's direction gives him the ability to be funny with his character, and he creates laughter and sadness in the auditorium.

Sam Jones casts a female to play the part of Horatio. This could not have worked better, not just any female performs this lovable character but Hayley Carmichael. As the last standing person after the plays climax, Carmichael gives a touching speech which left the atmosphere in the auditorium still, yet so powerful. This helped set up the utter perfection that is the last moment of the play.

I couldn't wait to jump up from my seat to give not only Michael Sheen but every aspect of this performance a well-deserved standing ovation.

Hamlet is unmissable for so many reasons. From the powerful acting to the magnificent lighting and sound, which makes it such an intriguing piece of theatre whether you are a Shakespeare fan or not.

You cannot judge this play for its outgoingness; you can only praise it. If you do choose to shun it, be prepared to thoroughly regret that choice later.

The Westbridge, Theatre Local, Peckham George Toohey

The story of *The Westbridge*, written by Rachel De-lahey, is helped delightfully by a wonderful cast with a range of different and unique talents. Along with the amazing enticing storyline, genius of a director, whose exploration skills are remarkable and truly sensational acting. *The Westbridge* is by far the play to see this year.

The Westbridge is set in modern-day England. The play kicks off by breaking the fourth wall and making the audience question reality or acting. It is a play outlining the racial abuse in South London, and showing the hardships between interracial relationships. You enter the burnt-up room to discover the play will be performed around you and that you're on swivel chairs. This is an amazing example of the genius who is Clint Dyer.

The Westbridge is set in and around the Westbridge estate, and mainly involves characters of different races and religions: a black man, white woman and an Indian family. Are all caught up in the controversy, of a rumour sparked because of an interracial relationship, which results in rioting, and outburst throughout the Westbridge estate, and the South of London. With the media aggravating the situation, tensions arise and this sparks doubt in another couple who had recently just moved in with each other. This also consists of a Black male and an Indian female.

Overall *The Westbridge* is a truly sensational play, helped ever more by dramatic lighting and enthusiastic young actors.



The Westbridge, Theatre Local, Peckham Chloe Burrows

In the well-presented, secularised Bussey Building in Peckham, De-lahay confronted the living issue of tensions between Black and Asian people living on the same Battersea estate in London. What sparks the crisis is the apparent rape of a 14-year-old Asian girl by a Black gang. Typically, the Black boy Andre is accused of this, due to his racial backgrounds and stereotypical views in today's society. This not only triggers local riots, which reflects what happened in August 2011, but exposes the cracks in the relationship between the Pakistani Soriya and her mixed race boyfriend, Marcus, who have just moved in together causing some tension between Soriya's father and partner. To complicate matters further, Soriya is torn between her lover and her White, flat-sharing, female best friend who goes by the name of George. George's 'snobby' attitude definitely reflects those in London who feel they are more superior to everyone, when realistically, she lacks confidence and has yet to find her identity. Her typical wannabe model tasks provide a sense of humour to the audience, as she feels standing next to a "Dallas" chicken and chips takeaway will clog her pours, which could later affect her 'delusional' modelling career and 'beautiful looks'. I am surprised and irritated that an intelligent woman like Soriya should be perturbed by a nosey old Asian woman who tells her that "Asian girls should be for Asian men" after Soriya willingly helps her with her shopping. This turns this mini world into a dystopia causing everything to fall down. As little as her part was, she did not fail to interlace her words throughout *The Westbridge*.



De-lahay captures excellently the confusion of cultural identity in the modern world, and tackles racial issues and individuals' experience. Surprisingly, the audience is placed in the middle of the 'stage', some placed back to back or next to one another with the action surrounding the audience. Metaphorically, this symbolises what we are surrounded by in today's society in London. Fortunately, I was placed on a swivel chair which I must admit provided easier access to face the action and changes in where the action was happening. This not only allowed the audience to watch *The Westbridge*, but to watch one another's reactions: making you feel a part of the Westbridge with 'no escape'. Unfortunately to the centre of the stage, some were placed on black chairs of which were stuck to the

floor, which I could tell by the woman in front of me, was uncomfortable to face the different stations of action. The burnt out building definitely set the scene of 'shabby' and dirty London. Clint Dyer breaks the entire fourth wall and we are forced to be alerted from the outset. When the woman beside me starts screaming her



bag has been taken, I could not make out if she was being serious or a part of the act.

Each character's acting was absolutely incredible and extremely naturalistic. Soriya's typical middle class approach was definitely reflected in the way she walked across the stage, spoke and her dress sense. Her smart and casual look contrasted with Andre's typical teenage dress sense, consisting of a black tracksuit and a puff jacket with trainers. Soriya understands Andre's struggle as not too long ago, she grew up on the same estate. Her father's pushy attempt to get her a scholarship to get into one of the top universities is the only reason why Soriya can now be considered as 'middle class' and how she met her best friend, George. Drunken George attempts to make Soriya forget about her past life after their night out, telling her to stop talking to Andre, which determined and genuine Soriya ignores. Ryan Calais Cameron (Andre) was a phenomenal actor, his eagerness for independence definitely reflects boys in today's society, who take on much more than they can handle.



Clint Dyer's staging techniques reinforced the naturalism. The urban 'funky house' thumping music and flashing lights allowed the night club scene with only Soriya and George, leaving the audience to seem like the other members at the club, to be laced with imagination.

The lack of props worked excellently with your imagination placing together what could have been there. The shop owned by Soriya's father had only two boxes of Walkers crisp placed on top of each other, with his house and Andre's house being symbolised by only a front door. Perhaps this was most practical due to a lot of stage movement. The transitions of the setting are the only criticism I have towards *The Westbridge*. Whilst a scene was going on in one corner of the stage, the other characters were slowly creeping behind you in dim lighting placing the props down for the next scene. As picky as it may seem, it is only constructive and something to work on, even if the black-out on the transitions were darker with less noise it would make an improvement.

Soriya may come from a Muslim family, but is a secularised clubber who does not go for Muslim or Asian men. Her boyfriend laughingly spurns the idea that he wants recipes from the Reggae Reggae Cookbook and eager Soriya attempts to please him. However, Marcus confesses his confusion to his racial backgrounds due to his father "never being around" causing him to feel more in touch with his 'White side'. The confusion of racial backgrounds was definitely



emphasised by De-Lahey. Even White George claims to be more 'street' than any Caribbean 'brother' from the estate claiming she loves 'curry goat' (a Jamaican dish), more than anyone. The mother's heartache at the rumours of her son being portrayed as a rapist leaves you helplessly sympathetic, wanting to tell her the truth. In short, the play's message is that the old racial categories today make little sense; and, even if Clint Dyer's production is a bit hectic, Chetna Pandya as Soriya, Ryan Cameron as Andre and Fraser Ayres as her lover put De-lahay's ideas across with enormous style and naturalism.