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Review: What is the Matter with Mary Jane and Slut at St Martins Theatre

Review by Lucinda Naughton

Fourth Wall Theatre Company launched in February 2020, unlucky timing, and, after relaunching their company earlier this year with *BAM on the Green* in January, they now bring the double bill of *What is the Matter with Mary Jane* by Wendy Harmer and Sancia Robinson and *Slut* by Patricia Cornelius to St Martin's Theatre.

Fourth Wall Theatre Company intentionally chose the two Australian plays, which are inspired by true stories, to showcase for their first indoor stage debut, as Company Director Susie Sparks and Artistic Director Natasha Boyd say in their introduction, 'It's a chance to see ourselves reflected in all our rawness, and to consider how our own society responds to issues big and small.'

The double bill opens with *What is the Matter with Mary Jane*, a play that explores the incredibly difficult experiences of anorexia nervosa and bulimia through the protagonist, Sancia. Sancia is played by the whole cast of four: Casey Bohan, Jen Bush, Samuel Howard and Isabella Perversi. Originally written as a one-woman play, Fourth Wall Theatre Company's interpretation featured three women and one man to reflect how these devastating mental illnesses can affect anyone; the introduction of three additional actors works seamlessly well. The four actors rotate playing the 'physical' Sancia, while the other three actors represent the different voices within Sancia's mind. This is a wonderful technique and interpretation of the play as it's a creative and innovative approach to represent the psyche and works powerfully to portray a deep insight into the effects of these diseases. The actors yelled, abused, manipulated and coaxed Sancia's physical self throughout the play and it was interesting to see such diversity within characters performed and the contrasting figments of Sancia's imagination represented, reflecting the minds of people with anorexia or bulimia and the harrowing experiences they endure. Artistic Director Natasha Boyd also designed the costume and set, which both worked wonderfully in reflecting the tone and progressing the action within the play. The cast wore hoodies and used the hoods to indicate to the audience when the physical Sancia switched from one actor to another and they also added to the mood of the play.

The play is then followed by *Slut*, written by the incredible playwright Patricia Cornelius. I adore her work so it was wonderful to see one of her productions presented by Fourth Wall Theatre. Sparks and Boyd introduce the play wonderfully: 'Inspired by a violent city shooting and negative media treatment of the female victim as a "party girl stripper", this play reimagines her potential timeline and society's inherent sexist and misogynistic role in her destiny.' The play is full of energy from the cast of five: Bohan, Bush, Malaynee Hayden, Julia Lambert and Reschelle O'Connor as the protagonist, Lolita. They bring the youth and innocence (yet not so innocent) nature of high school students to life. Boyd's costume design adds to this tone by using simple yet effective student uniforms, which slowly change and deteriorate towards the end of the play, reflecting the deterioration of Lolita and also high school innocence. The play is harrowing, but funny and through the lens of high school students' eyes it touches on many important themes, including puberty, early sexualisation, adoration, bullying, betrayal, and sexual and domestic violence. It explores these issues and confronts the audience by showing how prevalent they are in our society. Truly powerful theatre.

The two short plays work well side-by-side as they both explored such important and harrowing issues. It's wonderful to see Fourth Wall Theatre Company taking on such important works.



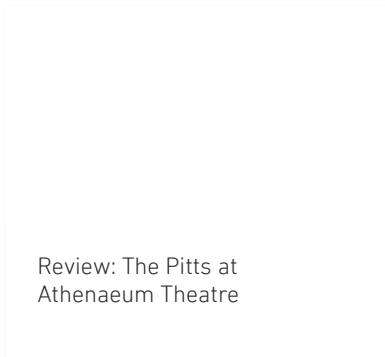
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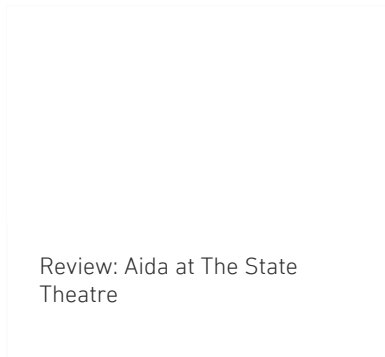
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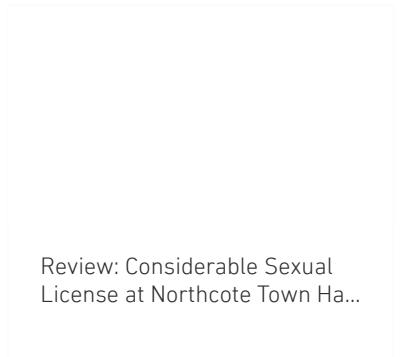
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