

Britain meets Bollywood: The Wah! Wah! Girls glitter at LSE's Peacock Theatre

blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2012/06/18/britain-meets-bollywood-the-wah-wah-girls-glitter-at-lses-peacock-theatre/

2012-6-18

A new musical explores British-Asian identity while celebrating the glamour of Bollywood.

LSE students looking for a Bollywood fix needn't stray far this month: a new musical at the Peacock Theatre on campus evokes the best of mainstream Hindi cinema—love at first sight, disapproving parents, villains, the re-emergence of a long-lost relative and a profusion of song, dance and glittery costumes. “[Wah! Wah! Girls: The Musical](#)”, a joint production of dance house Sadler's Wells, Theatre Royal Stratford East and the Cornwall-based Kneehigh theatre company, is a Bollywood musical with a British twist: as the action unfolds in gritty east London, the show is as much an exploration of British-Asian identity as it is a celebration of Bollywood glamour.

[Tanika Gupta's](#) story revolves around two women seeking their freedom: Sita, a teenager from Leeds who escapes her oppressive family and arrives in London to learn how to dance (and finish an accountancy degree to boot), and Soraya, a classically trained dancer who left India – and a broken heart – many years ago and now runs the Wah! Wah! dance club in east London. In sharing their stories through song and dance, Sita and Soraya are joined by Cal, an Afro-Caribbean neighbour, and Pavel, a Polish handyman. Throughout the show, [Niraj Chag's](#) original score weaves together Bollywood beats, reggae, rap and disco, highlighting British multiculturalism and proving that east London is no less colourful than the set of a Bollywood extravaganza.

“Wah! Wah! Girls” also strikes a serious note by portraying the reality of the British immigrant experience: down the road from Soraya's dance club, Mansoor's shop is vandalised; Sita has to balance her ambitions with her conservative family's notions of ‘honour’; characters watch their backs as young men in hoodies menacingly stalk the streets. For all the exuberance of the show's Bollywood moments, director [Emma Rice](#) ensures that audience members never forget that they're in London, especially as London buses roll on and off stage and grey pigeons are omnipresent.

That said, Bollywood stays at the heart of the show, with the characters' stories conveniently hearkening back to some of the greatest dance sequences in Bollywood: Rekha's coy turns in “*Umrao Jaan*”, Madhuri Dixit's hip shakes and belly quakes in “*Devdas*” and “*Khalnayak*” and Helen's seductive moves in “*Sholay*”. These iconic dance numbers are seamlessly fused with modern and street dance moves—an impressive feat given that none of the “Wah! Wah! Girls” performers are trained dancers, unlike their Bollywood counterparts.

Indian choreographer Javed Sanadi, who worked with Kathak choreographer Gauri Sharma Tripathi, says that the show's goal was to modernise the Bollywood moves to make them more apt for a British setting. “Bollywood dance is very versatile and constantly incorporating different styles,” he says. “We think of Bollywood dance as *bhel puri*, a



tasty appetiser offering a teaser of all other dance styles—classical, folk, contemporary, Kathak, hip hop. For that reason, it was fun to tweak film choreography for the stage and for a western audience. What makes it Bollywood is the emotion that goes into all those moves.” And there was no shortage of on-stage emotion in the resulting musical melodrama.

Overall, the “Wah! Wah! Girls” offers a wonderful opportunity for Indian students at LSE to have a fun night out, enjoy a taste of home and get a better sense of the dynamic city they now inhabit.

“Wah! Wah! Girls: The Musical” runs at the Peacock Theatre until June 23, 2012.

- Copyright © 2016 London School of Economics