

British Theatre Guide

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Blue Mist

Mohamed-Zain Dada

Royal Court Theatre, London

Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

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There is a moment in *Blue Mist* when the actors dance and sing an amusing version of the *Mary Poppins* song “A Spoonful of Sugar” with the words modified to lines such as “just a spoonful of Muslim helps the news go down in the most alarming way.”

We don't have to look very far to see any number of ways the UK media unfairly negatively depicts Muslims. Not many years ago, they generated a huge national moral panic about Birmingham schools being taken over by extremist Muslims based on a ridiculous anonymous letter sent to the Birmingham education department. This massive injustice was chronicled in Lung Theatre's play [Trojan Horse](#), but you will have to look long and hard to find much of an apology in the UK media for its misrepresentation of the affair.

Such things crop up in the conversations of three South Asian youths in their twenties sitting around Chunkyz Shisha Lounge which is, according to a podcast being made by one of the characters, an “alternative to pubs, where you can grab a pipe, socialise, laugh, dream and scheme.”

The show opens with them chatting about boxing. They swap gossip and talk about their worries. There's lots of laddish banter, and the conversation is light and humorous, but they also express frustrations with their lives.

Rashid (Arian Nik) works at Heathrow but would like to run a gym. Unfortunately, he doesn't have the funding and can't imagine anyone loaning him the money. It has crossed his mind to go to Haz, except that feels like a bad start given Haz sells steroids under the counter at his own gym.

Asif (Salman Akhtar) doesn't like his own work and is searching for a wife, though even online dating for him seems fruitless. But he tells a good story before asking how Jihad (Omar Bynon) is doing with his attempts to get into journalism.

Jihad says “that dream is dead” though he has been toying with entering a competition to make a programme if he could only think of a subject. Asif suggests he report on Chunkyz Lounge.

Taking up the idea, he wins an invitation to produce an audio programme, except what he intends to be a positive account of a neglected community asset is rejected until he modifies it to become “Shishi Boys: The Pipe, Protest and Perversion” because, as Fiona of the company funding Jihad points out, what they need is a report from someone belonging to the community that is not “afraid to show the good the bad and the ugly.”

The consequences of this are not good for the lads, for their community or for Chunkyz. Jihad may have begun a journalistic career which he argues gives him the opportunity to create more positive

stories from inside the system, but his friends are not so convinced.

The characters are realistic and believable. They are performed engagingly with sensitivity and humour by three very effective actors.

There is no question that there needs to be better representation of the UK in its media. Some 52% of UK journalists went to private schools and only 0.4% of journalists are Muslim compared to 4% of the population at large.

The elitist nature of the UK media along with Britain's habit of invading Muslim countries in part explains the general negative depiction of Muslims, but as Mohamed-Zain Dada's thoughtful and entertaining play illustrates, simply improving diversity in journalism will not be enough to change the often cruel and dysfunctional media representation of Muslims.

Reviewer: [Keith Mckenna](#)