

British Theatre Guide

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Extraordinary Women – a new musical of the 1920s

Sarah Travis and Richard Stirling from the novel by Sir Compton Mackenzie

Jermyn Street Theatre

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23 July–10 August 2025

Compton McKenzie's 1928 novel is set on the island of Sirene, a fictionalised version of Capri, and its characters and plot reflect the world of Bohemians, artists and writers whom he knew when he lived among them, and specially the Sapphic society that he presents as *Extraordinary Women*.

It is a complex story of flirtations and sexual infidelities not always easy to follow in this musical adaptation but still very entertaining. It is introduced by a chorus of Sappho (Amira Matthews) and a trio of the island's Sirens (Jasmine Kerr, Monique Young and Sophie Louise Dann) who dance with undulating arms in what the early twentieth century called "Greek" style as they sing to explain that what follows is "just a game of love and chance" before going on to double in a succession of other roles.

The main strand of the story centres on the romantic affairs of fickle Italian Rosalba. Her wealthy English lover, Aurora Freemantle, known as Rory, has bought a house on the island hoping Rosalba will settle down there with her. Some hopes! Amy Ellen Richardson gives Rosalba a Dietrich-like swagger and confidence; she knows women fancy her. Caroline Sheen is a gentle, reliable Rory. She gives a house-warming party full of carryings-on when some pearls appear to have been stolen, but the details aren't important; it's the flirting that provides the action.

Under Paul Foster's direction, this is essentially an ensemble piece, but there is an especially effective double from Sophie Louise Dann as prim, prudish governess Miss Chimbley and a delightfully over-the-top, opera-voiced Cleo; she is very funny. Jack Butterworth, the only man around, doubles so many roles (including the local policeman, a kilted Scot with a war wound and the camp friend Rory calls Daffodil) that each new appearance gets a laugh.

The score reflects the period, pleasant tunes that are fresh yet feel familiar and include ragtime, jazz, a waltz and a tango. Musical director Sam Sommerfield on piano and James William-Pattison on bass and guitar do the work of a big band. They drown out some of the lyrics but help drive the pace, while Joanna Goodwin provides lively choreography that gets slick execution. Carla Joy Evans provides some great frocks, including some chic beaded numbers.

Extraordinary Women gets commitment from all its performers but doesn't take itself too seriously. It doesn't break new ground in lyric theatre, but it is light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek fun.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)