

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Ladies Down Under

Amanda Whittington

New Vic Theatre

New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme

8–30 March 2024

Both professional or amateur companies have hit on a favourite when staging Amanda Whittington's *Ladies' Day*, a play involving four women from a Hull fish-packing factory who have a day out at the races. It's a heart-warming story which is ideal for professional companies as it can be performed by only five actors, while it's perfect for amateur groups as there are roles for 10 people without doubling.

North Staffordshire's New Vic Theatre presented [*Ladies' Day*](#) in 2023. I've seen the play several times and thought that version was the best I'd ever watched. Now the Newcastle-under-Lyme theatre has turned to the follow-up, *Ladies Down Under*. All five cast members reprise their roles in a play that's not performed as regularly as its predecessor.

After coming into some money Pearl, Jan, Shelley and Linda go to Australia on a once-in-a-lifetime tour. It turns into a journey of discovery for all of them as they come to realise what they really want out of life.

There's no doubting the commitment and adroitness of the cast who are able to get the audience on their side as they cope with situations that test their resolve to the maximum. Unexpected health problems, doubts about love and a search for freedom present the characters with difficulties they could never have imagined.

But the play takes a long time to warm up. The most charged moment in the first half comes towards the end when the women, tired and fraught after their long flight, reveal their true feelings for one another. The second half has more tender moments, especially the scenes in which two of the characters open up to reveal their insecurities and shattered dreams.

Annie Kirkman is again fabulous as Shelley, the glamorous, loud, wannabe model who wants only the fine things in life. Kate Wood as Pearl, the oldest of the four, surprises her friends with her live-for-the-moment attitude. She is particularly commendable when she begins to act uncharacteristically after smoking a joint.

Tanya-Loretta Dee (Jan) earns empathy as she juggles with what she really wants out of her relationship with former factory supervisor Joe. Has she made a mistake flying all that way to see him again? Jo Patmore (Linda), the vulnerable young woman who wants to use her newfound wealth for philanthropic causes, has some of the most touching lines in the play as she contemplates how money has changed all the women.

Gareth Cassidy, who played all six male characters in *Ladies' Day*, this time has four roles which are completely different. He is joined by Australian Richard Lund who also does a fine job of

presenting a similar number of characters in contrasting style. Both look outrageous in drag as Koala Bare and Bondi Bitch during a raucous LGBT party.

Marieke Audsley, who also directed *Ladies' Day* at the New Vic, introduces some neat touches, including having Cassidy and Lund as mischievous, slightly camp flight attendants.

On the whole, *Ladies Down Under* reaches great heights in the second half after a delayed take-off.

Reviewer: [Steve Orme](#)