



Stags and Hens (The Remix)
at The Altrincham Garrick Playhouse
Reviewed by Katie Leicester, May 2018

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Willy Russell was born in 1947 in Whiston, Merseyside, into a working class family with an alcoholic father and a mother who worked in a warehouse. He grew up around very strong women relatives who later influenced him to write about believable convincing Liverpudlian female characters in the 1970s such as Educating Rita, Shirley Valentine and Mrs Johnstone in Blood Brothers. I was intrigued to see how this "remix" of Stags and Hens

had changed from the original staging in the 1980s.

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Russell originally wrote Stags and Hens in 1978, and was first published in script format in 1986. He adapted 75 percent of the original script in 2008 to produce 'Stags and Hens - The Remix'. In this new script he has sharpened the pace and added modern lines appropriate to the present day, and included a lot more swearing but has kept the storyline and the period intact. The play is set in 1977 rather than present day because stag and hen parties are more commonly hosted abroad nowadays and not in back street night clubs in the UK.

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The stage set is that of a run-down club in Liverpool with an effective split stage of the ladies and gents toilets, brilliantly designed by the team making it a perfect space for the script to play out, excellent attention to detail from the graffiti, hand dryers, sinks and urinals right down to the condom machine on the wall all made this a realistic and believable setting.

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The club for the night was chosen by the bride to be Linda (**Francesca Heraghty-Smith**) because she wants to dance to a live band as well as a disco, but unbeknown to her fiancé Dave (

Adam Rogers

), with his pals, is at the same venue. Dave is already intoxicated and in his drunken stupor becomes ill from the Indian vindaloo curry he ate prior to the club, washed down with a mix of spirits and Asti Spumante so spends the remainder of the evening (and the play) in the Gents with his head down the lavatory bowl after throwing up on his pals Robbie (

Chris Wagstaff

) Top Man Suit.

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The friends realise that it would be tempting fate if the couple were to meet the night before the wedding so much of the play is about keeping them apart. In the club toilets the boys talk about the girls and vice versa - an obvious place for a gossip and to voice those pent up frustrations and thoughts on the opposite sex, as well as touching up your make-up, doing your hair and satisfying your ego by writing your name on the already well graffitied walls. The loos being the only escape from the confines of a noisy and crowded night club, and dance floor where the real pressure is on to 'tap off' with girls who look like 'the sugar babes' or the 'sugar puff monster', and boys who look like 'Justin Bieber' or are just totally 'shaggable' even if you're married or soon to be.

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In the play the bride to be Linda meets Peter (**Ethan Martin**), an ex-boyfriend who went to London (where he lost his Liverpudlian accent) and found a bit of fame as an x-factor contestant, whom is now touring as a singer in a band and is coincidentally performing at the club the night of her hen party. Dave's mates Kav (

Joshua Evans-Smith

), gang leader Eddie (

Josh Leach

) and Linda's friends, decide to take the law into their own hands when they suspect that Linda is seeing Pete again and see she is having second thoughts about marrying Dave.

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Stags And Hens is a very funny look at the whys and wherefores of love, lust and marriage and is sprinkled with Liverpudlian humour, but underneath the surface of laughs there is a deeper commentary on working class life, misogyny, opportunity and expectation. However this Willy Russell's scripted play lacks the depth and compassion of Shirley Valentine, Educating Rita and Mrs Johnstone in Blood Brothers, partly because the characters are all half-drunk (or fully drunk) throughout and it is hard to empathise with them. The boys' ringleader Eddie is so dislikeable and aggressive that in reality you would not want anything to do with him, and certainly wouldn't invite him on a lad's night out, however he meets his match with the equally tough and domineering Bernie very amusingly played by **Fiona Primrose**.

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Sound was an issue as the actors/actresses didn't use microphones so relied solely on their projection across the large auditorium. Also disappointing and unrealistic was the blaring music from the dancefloor, which could only be heard when they opened the door to enter the toilet area, and didn't feel true to a nightclub where you would expect to hear a dull tone of beating music in the distance through the swinging doors, not complete silence.

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The accents were not convincing, and difficult to listen to at times, but they did extremely well to maintain this throughout their lines. The saving grace for me personally was the character Maureen, played by **Megan Royle**, who had the audience belly laughing with her one liner's and fabulous interpretation of the character. Also **Chris Wagstaff** who played Robbie the ladies' man, was fantastic in his delivery throughout the play.

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In summary a little too much swearing and vulgarity for my liking but never the less a watchable performance as the team did the best they could with the script, but one I would not repeat in a rush, as I think 'The Remix' is more of a 'vulgar re-edit'.