



U.S. TAKE ON U.K. HIT: Michael Abourizk and Trip Langley in *Beautiful Thing* at the Spoon Theater.
Photo: Katie

Theater Review

Charm of U.K. drama *Beautiful Thing* lost in American translation

Beautiful Thing

Written by Jonathan Harvey

Directed by Michelle Kuchuk

Through July 25, 2010

Spoon Theater

38 West 38th Street, 5th floor

(646-299-5345), www.spoontheater.org

By Scott Harrah

Beautiful Thing, the West End show that was the basis for the hit 1996 indie film, is a story with characters (and specific accents) so heavily rooted in British culture that it is almost too much of a challenge for any group of American actors, especially amateurs.

This delicate drama, about two teenage boys coming of age and discovering their homosexuality while living in a housing project in Thamesmead in South East London circa 1993, is a staple of community theater in the United Kingdom. However, it is not a show that Americans should even consider producing without careful casting and an outstanding dialogue coach who's familiar with British colloquialisms and regional dialects. It is nearly impossible for Yanks that didn't grow up eating a dish called "bubble and squeak" to perform in a show where it is joked about.

The story centers on Jamie (Trip Langley), a teenager who is often picked on by others, and his concerned mother Sandra (Julie Campbell), a single parent who works at a local pub. Jamie strikes up more than just a friendship with neighbor Ste (Michael Abourizk). The storyline is predictable but, in the film adaptation at least, had a certain amount of charm thanks, in part, to the character of Leah (Rebecca Lee Lerman), a neighbor girl who was recently expelled from school and is obsessed with Mama Cass from the Mamas and the Papas. In the film, the role was portrayed as a smart-mouthed West Indian teenager, but one wonders what anyone had in mind with the completely miscast Ms. Lerman.

Of the five cast members here, only two are even remotely believable as working-class Brits: Ms. Campbell as the mother and Mr. Abourizk as Ste. Both have plausible accents and a good grasp of their characters, but neither can save this ill-conceived American interpretation of a British cult classic from its many misguided shortcomings.

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