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F10 - CALENDAR

THEATER REVIEW

'Red Devils' an Intense, Gritty Look at Stunted Lives

By **RAY LOYND**
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Watching the scintillating British drama "Red Devils" at Theatre/Theater is like being plopped, face first, onto the rutty streets of Manchester. The texture of the writing and the acting catches the gray pallor in the air, the city's narrow horizons, the giddy hysteria of stunted lives.

We're in the company of four soccer-crazed young women who manage to wrangle tickets to the Cup Final where their beloved Manchester United Red Devils are waging a ferocious battle. So good is the acting that the electric moments on the field are

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conveyed, not by a hammy announcer, but entirely by the silent expressions on the actors' faces before they burst into delirium.

We are in that stadium. The postage stamp-sized stage at the back of Theatre/Theater has been wondrously expanded by the inventiveness of designers James Phillips (sets), Robert Fonda (sound) and especially Raub McKim, whose lighting utilizes many of the tricks of shooting a movie.

The sports backdrop is a graphic way to view an England ignored by the tourist office, and the material is all the more potent for its all-female slant.

Writing in the gritty grain of Britain's neo-realistic dramas, playwright and Manchester native Debbie Horsfield is reminiscent of fellow native playwright Shelagh Delaney. Horsfield's depiction of yearning, working-class characters festering from a life on the dole, a life where soccer is the only activity to stir the imagination, is, of course, resonant here as well.

The specifics — the uncanny accents (fully comprehensible),

the vulnerabilities, the physical brawling, the emotional snarling—are tautly shaped by director and player Alicia Gold (who, along with co-star Lillian Dean, was in the Off-Broadway production).

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to leave Manchester, is wiry, angular, metallic in her anger. Gold's Beth, the tiniest of the four and the resident boozier (check out how subtly she calibrates her progressive stupors), is a clanging caldron of

raucous, racist energy.

When Phil, fed up with Beth's bigotry and histrionics, smacks Beth to

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the pavement with one quick punch it's like a thunderclap, so decisive it catches your breath.

The acting, layered with the hopes and squalor of the jungle, is uniformly exceptional. There's Dyanne DiRosario's dim headed, curvy Alice, whose idea of the good life is marriage with her jerk of a boyfriend Kevin.

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Played without an intermission, the play, written in 1983 as the first of a trilogy, is like a torch lighting up this matchbox of a stage.

The Red Devils are in town and they are kicking heads.

*"Red Devils," Theatre/Theater
1713 Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood
Thursdays-Fridays, 8 p.m. Ends
May 7. \$8. (213) 664-4011. Running
Time: 1 hour, 40 minutes.*

SOCCER CRAZED: Four young Women in Manchester go to a soccer match and a whole society of stunted lives unravels in "Red Devils," an intense flame of a production at Theatre/Theater. Reviewed by Ray Loynd. **F10**