

Red Devils* *Produced by Cynthia Kane, Margo Romero and Jeff Murray for Theatre/ Theater 1713 Cahuenga Blvd., Hollywood; (213) 664-4011. Opened March 18; plays Thurs. & Fri., 8; closes May 7.*

This is the play that answers the question, "What do they know of England who only England know?" It is also a brilliantly written, rip-roaring study of four young women; all soccer fans (What else is there to do in a city as cold and gray as Manchester?), each of whom is extremely lovable in her own right.

Red Devils by Debbie Horsfield follows the trials and tribulations of four working class young women as they conspire to acquire tickets to a Cup Final, cheering their Manchester United "Red Devils" on to victory, and exposing every nook and cranny of their souls in the process. What this excellent play teaches us about England today could fill Wembley Stadium. *Red Devils* continues a long and exciting tradition of English neo-realistic dramas that are as revealing as they are compelling.

Director Alicia Gold has assembled a gifted ensemble whose members play as if they had worked together a dozen years. In addition to causing *Red Devils* successfully, she has blocked the play in a tiny space with considerable skill, and managed to make certain her cast's Manchester accents are perfectly executed. These people not only come from the same city, by the sound of their voices one would guess they were all raised in the same neighborhood. And the more we know about them, the more we want to know.

The four women of the cast all demonstrate qualities that both illuminate conditions in Manchester as well as set standards for acting in Los Angeles. The exquisitely lovely Lillian Dean plays phil-outwardly the toughest of the lot; inwardly the most vulnerable. She will be the one person to escape the confines of this lifestyle, although at first she appears to be the most immersed in neighborhood rituals and hometown worship. Her ultimate departure will be, if anything, a gesture of contempt or contradiction to those who tell her she does not have the guts to get out. It is a magnificent performance.

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Mehr Mansuri as Nita, the gentle Pakistani who becomes the target of Beth's racism. Nita is the only one of the four with a job, and the way in which the others respond to her tells us something about not only the

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prejudice in England but also something of the dangerous fanaticism of feeling in Germany at the moment.

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for a solitary instant does she indulge in self-pity, which is precisely why we come to care so deeply about her. We share the pain of a woman who suffers for being good. It happens all the time and is in many ways the most difficult to endure. But given her invincible bravery, we know she will weather any storm.

Dyanne DiRosario as Alice, the buxom, trusting sort who regards marriage as a panacea, has to be told, "There's more to living than frozen food." What is wonderful about DiRosario's portrayal is that she never patronizes her character, but mines the profound humanity of an ordinary person with considerable wit and skill. She passes blithely over the fact that Alice is not above seeing other men on her way to spending a life with the surly Kevin-whom we come to know very well although we never meet him. Like the other characters of this play, she is rich in juicy contradictions.

Rounding out the company is Alicia Gold as Beth who proves to be that rarity-an actor who can direct herself-and others-in a challenging work with completely happy results. Gold flits about the stage, particularly when inebriated, with the anxious desperation of a sparrow battering against the sides of a cage. The smallest of the four women, she has the compensating desire to dominate everyone. Beth is feisty and spirited when sober, but verbally lethal, especially to herself, when bombed out of her mind. Gold handles the character perfectly. Much too good an actor to indicate, we can tell by her performance precisely how much booze she has consumed at any given moment.

Raub McKim's lighting design brings out the bleak tones of urban sprawl. James Phillips' set design turns a tiny stage into a giant stadium. Robert Fonda's sound design, including music by Billy Bragg and The Specials, proves that Manchester musicians are the equal of anyone in the Seattle scene. Robert Goodwin's fight choreography, like Gold's direction, is vivid, graphic and downright thrilling.