



Theater: "The Wolves" Howl



Michael Giltz, Contributor BookFilter creator

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THE WOLVES *** out of ****

THE PLAYWRIGHTS REALM AT DUKE ON 42ND ST.

You're staring at an indoor soccer field, with the artificial turf stretching off into the distance. Any sport meant for grass is a lot harder, a lot tougher when you play it on artificial turf. Tumbling, falling down, jarring hits — they all hurt a lot more inside. Anyone who has watched fierce young people playing rugby or volleyball or soccer up close understands perfectly well how strong and tough they must be. And there they are: a team of high school players, young women coming together for an indoor soccer team. They're stretching and everyone is talking at once, with insults and questions and revealing detail surfacing amidst the babble until it's swallowed up again.

In this impressive play by Sarah DeLappe, we spend the rest of the play getting to know these characters. Naturally, we identify them at first by their positions and the odd detail: the loud, all-elbows striker, the focused team captain, the Christian, the quiet goalie and so on. In overlapping dialogue that's a marvel of naturalism, even the characters that seem merely types — the home-schooled oddball, the anorexic and so on — become specific and individual. Full credit to director Lila Neugebauer, the excellent casting by Telsey + Company (also riding high with the hit NBC drama *This Is Us*), the entire cast (there isn't a weak one in the bunch) and above all the words of DeLappe.

Superficially, the play brings up all sorts of hot button issues — sex and sexuality, peer pressure, eating disorders, fitting in, and so on. But the strength of *The Wolves* is that these arise naturally because they're a part of life. This isn't an AfterSchool Special and those topics are not what the show is "about." It's at its best simply getting us to see these characters not as types but real people, not to mention committed athletes. Indeed, I thought the show had come to a natural, fitting conclusion when the goalie was alone on the field, practicing on her own. That's right, I thought. They're going to nationals so these are strong, committed players with dedication and heart and serious skills.

Alas, the show wasn't done. Story intruded with a dramatic and wholly unnecessary plot twist, not to mention the unwelcome intrusion of a parent (played by the welcome actress Kate Arrington). Dramatic turns were precisely what *The Wolves* avoided for most of its length. It's a pity after all its development that they didn't realize simply cutting the last ten minutes of the show (without sacrificing the reconciliation of certain players and the final team cheer) would have made the entire work so much better.

An injury was all the drama a story like *The Wolves* needed. And while it injured itself unnecessarily by stretching the story to include melodrama, it's not a debilitating one. What remains is a good play presented in a sterling production with a great young cast. Next time, DeLappe will hopefully trust the audience and her own skill and not overshoot the goal right at the buzzer. Happily, she and her cast had already run up the score.

THEATER OF 2016

Employee Of The Year (Under The Radar at Public) ***

Germinal (Under The Radar At Public) *** 1/2

Fiddler On The Roof 2015 Broadway revival with Danny Burstein ** 1/2

Skeleton Crew ***

Noises Off (2016 Broadway revival) ** but *** if you've never seen it before

The Grand Paradise ***

Our Mother's Brief Affair * 1/2

Something Rotten ***

Sense & Sensibility (Bedlam revival) *** 1/2

Broadway & The Bard * 1/2

Prodigal Son **

A Bronx Tale: The Musical **

Buried Child (2016 revival w Ed Harris) **

Nice Fish ***

Broadway By The Year: The 1930s at Town Hall ***

Hughie **

Pericles (w Christian Camargo) * 1/2

Straight ** 1/2

Eclipsed ***

Red Speedo ***

The Royale ** 1/2

Boy ****

The Robber Bridegroom ***

Hold On To Me, Darling ***

Blackbird ** 1/2

Disaster! *

The Effect ** 1/2

Dry Powder ** 1/2

Head Of Passes ** 1/2

Broadway By The Year: The 1950s *** 1/2

The Crucible (w Ben Whishaw) ***

Bright Star **

She Loves Me (w Laura Benanti) ***

Antlia Pneumatica ** 1/2

RSC at BAM: Richard II (w David Tennant) ** 1/2

RSC at BAM: Henry IV Part I and II (w Antony Sher) ***

RSC at BAM Henry V (w Alex Hassell) ** 1/2

Nathan The Wise ** 1/2

The Father **

American Psycho **

Waitress ** 1/2

Fully Committed ** 1/2

Long Day's Journey Into Night ***

A Streetcar Named Desire (w Gillian Anderson) ***

Tuck Everlasting **

War **

Paramour * 1/2

Troilus & Cressida (Shakespeare in the Park) ** 1/2

Cats (on Broadway, 2016 revival) **

The Encounter (Complicite on Broadway) **

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (at Two River Theater) ***

Oh, Hello ** 1/2

Heisenberg ** 1/2

The Dudleys ** 1/2

Holiday Inn * 1/2

A Life ** 1/2

Love Love Love ** 1/2

The Radicalization Of Rolfe (FringeFest NYC) ** 1/2

Sweat * 1/2

The Death of The Last Black Man In The Whole Entire World aka The Negro Book Of The Dead ***

Falsettos **

Dead Poets Society ** 1/2

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812 *** (but ** 1/2 if you've seen it before)

Sweet Charity (w Sutton Foster) **

Mouse: The Persistence Of An Unlikely Thought *** 1/2

Dear Evan Hansen ***

The Illusionists: Turn Of The Century **

The Bodyguard **

The Wolves ***

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Note: Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.