

Show that was never closed (or clothed!) back in business

A SHOW that recounts how a famous theatre survived through the war years by staging 'tasteful' nude revues is heading into the West End.

Mrs Henderson Presents is a musical that tells how a supposedly shy and retiring 70-year-old widow put on shows featuring 'beautiful bosoms and bottoms' at the Windmill Theatre before and during World War II.

The production's based on the real-life tale of Laura Henderson and Vivian Van Damm, her general manager, who saved the struggling Windmill by slashing the costume budget to next to zero; undressing showgirls and posing them in a series of tableaux.

Judi Dench and Bob Hoskins starred in a big-screen version of the story ten years ago. The musical adaptation opened at the Theatre Royal Bath during the summer, with Olivier award-winning Tracie Bennett and Ian Bartholomew playing Mrs Henderson and Van Damm. Emma



Williams stars as Maureen, a shy young woman who blossoms thanks to Mrs H's encouragement.

The show begins previews at the Noel Coward Theatre on February 9, with the official opening night on February 16.

Michael Harrison, part of the producing team, told me why they'd gone for the Noel Coward. 'We didn't want a big barn of a place,' he said. And although Mrs H has scenes with high-kicking chorus lines and big, set-piece production numbers it also has intimate moments; particularly those set during the war years.

The Windmill show, known as Revueville, ran at a time when the Lord Chamberlain exercised censorship. Mrs Henderson side-stepped Indecency laws by presenting her 'girls' as still life, works of art. If they had to move, feather boas and fans artfully hid any part of their anatomy deemed to be offensive — all while the Blitz raged. Their famous boast was: 'We never closed.'