



Jasmin Colangelo, Niamh Perry and Sally Frith in *Mamma Mia!* on tour

Blackpool **Mamma Mia!**

Theatre
Opera House
June 20-September 14, PN June 24
Reviewer: Lisa Martland

It is a boost for Blackpool to be the exclusive UK location for the *Mamma Mia!* international tour, playing a 12-week season at the Opera House during the crucial holiday months.

Mamma Mia! is the dancing queen of jukebox musicals. Since producer Judy Craymer, writer Catherine Johnson and director Phyllida Lloyd sprinkled their magic on the much-loved ABBA catalogue of hits in 1999, there hasn't really been a show to rival it – not even the recently deceased *We Will Rock You*.

The difference is that while Johnson wrote a book that is moulded around songs that already existed, her storytelling draws an audience in and invites them to care about the characters created.

The ever-versatile Niamh Perry appears to morph into every character she plays and is a complete joy as Sophie, the young bride-to-be searching for her father. Equally impressive is Sara Poyzer in the much-coveted role of Sophie's mum Donna. The actor gives a truly captivating performance that reaches a crescendo with the intense emotion of *The Winner Takes It All*.

Within an incredibly sharp ensemble that showcases Anthony Van Laast's dynamic choreography, there is top class work from Sue Devaney and Geraldine Fitzgerald as Donna's best friends (particularly in the way they accentuate the innuendo and comedy), and Sophie's three dads – Richard Standing (Poyzer's real-life husband), Keiron Crook and Michael Beckley.

★★★★★ The champion of jukebox musicals, *Mamma Mia!* stands the test of time in its Blackpool summer season

Authors: Catherine Johnson (book), Benny Andersson, Bjorn Ulvaeus, Stig Anderson

(music/lyrics)
Director: Phyllida Lloyd
Musical director: Carlton Edwards
Choreographer: Anthony Van Laast
Design: Mark Thompson (set/costume), Howard Harrison (lighting), Andrew Bruce, Bobby Aitken (sound)
Technical: Martin Koch (musical supervisor), David Grindrod (casting), Ben Jefferson (company manager), Kay Sinclair (stage manager), Alison Breakwell (wardrobe mistress), Rob Wilson (wig master)
Cast includes: Sara Poyzer, Sue Devaney, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Richard Standing, Keiron Crook, Michael Beckley, Niamh Perry, Bart Edwards
Producers: Judy Craymer, Richard East, Bjorn Ulvaeus, Littlestar, Universal, Stage Entertainment, NGM
Running time: 2hrs 35mins

Brighton **Dawn French – 30 Million Minutes**

Light entertainment
Theatre Royal
June 5, then touring until December 6
Reviewer: Neil Norman

"I seem to live my life six months in arrears," says Dawn French at the start, adding that the show is an attempt to stop time and gather the elements of her life together before moving on. Time passing is a constant theme, prodding memories and anecdotes that spill out of her in a flood. Although many are funny some are quietly moving and others are explosively angry.

On a starkly effective set dominated by a red rectangle of light which frames her as well as the family snapshots and videos that pop up, French strides, bounces and shim-mies, patrolling the stage like the rock star-wannabe she admits to having been. Her lip-synching to Procul Harum's *A Whiter Shade of Pale* and her dancing to MC Hammer's *U Can't Touch This* are among the highlights.

But she is at her best when recalling her childhood and awkward teenage years, bringing them alive with vivid observational detail about behaviour, clothes and period attitudes. Her father is

a massive influence and his hidden depression and suicide when she was 19 is movingly conveyed, smoke rising from the floor like the car exhaust that killed him. She doesn't linger over details and moves on quickly to lighter memories but the point has been made. The breakdown of her personal anatomy is funny and brutally honest. Feminism is a fat issue. The stories are good and her revelations are nakedly confessional, even bizarre. Among her teenage crushes were Nana Mouskouri and Val Doonican. Who knew?
★★★★★ Revealing anecdotes from French's first solo show

Creator: Dawn French
Director: Michael Grandage
Design: Lez Brotherston (set/costume), Willie Williams (lighting/visuals), Ben Ringham, Max Ringham (music/sound)
Technical: Mark Risk (lighting programmer), Sam Pattinson (video producer), Damian Hale (video creative), Sam Jeffs (catalyst programmer)
Cast: Dawn French
Producers: Phil McIntyre, Michael Grandage Company
Running time: 2hrs

Derby **April in Paris**

Theatre
Derby Theatre
June 27-July 12, then touring until October 18, PN June 30
Reviewer: Pat Ashworth

John Godber revisits this delicious two-hander, written in 1992 and refreshed in the light of awakened vexations over Europe and hardship at home. It's familiar territory in the couple of northerners whose soured relationship has been aggravated by unemployment and the sheer dullness of a life going nowhere. Gripping and sniping at each other on the confined decking of their home has become so routine that Bet scarcely looks up from her celebrity magazine to do it.

Shobna Gulati and Joe McGann are beautifully matched. Gulati is laconic in her barbed speech and McGann is monosyllabic, yet