

Review: NHS The Musical

By Sara Lamerton

***NHS The Musical*, Theatre Royal Plymouth**

The NHS. Such a simple name, such a complex institution. A name we've all heard, said, defended, and clapped for repeatedly over the past 18 months. A name synonymous with 'being British'. But what exactly do you think of when you picture the backbone of our nation? Do you err on the pessimistic side: bed shortages, overpaid managers, failed targets, extended waiting times, and politicians' empty promises and their never ending political agendas?

Or maybe you consider yourself more of an optimist, picturing the beating heart of the nation through angelic nurses, superhero GPs, and the caring consultants all carrying the burden of this cherished socialist utopia on their near indestructible shoulders?

In all likelihood, like most of us, you're a combination of the two: simultaneously in awe at the sheer soul behind our Great British institution, yet all too aware of the pitfalls such an ambitious and complex creature creates.

Yet, whatever your beliefs or political leanings, one thing is certain, we all have a personal connection to it. Whether through the exceptional care of our loved ones; a cherished family member or valued friend who slogs away for longer hours and far less pay than we would; or an exaggerated tale of ridiculous waiting times and human blunders you frequently share to anyone who will listen.

Weaving three personal, and highly relatable stories between the wider tale of the NHS from birth to its modern day, troubled but God like, incarnation, *NHS The Musical*, written by Nick Stimson and Jimmy Jewel, Directed by Stephen Fletcher, follows Jillian, Arthur, and Robert as they journey from diagnosis, through clinical prioritisation, agonizing waits and delays, the inevitable issues with beds and cancellations, to treatment, recovery, and, in some cases, tragic fates.

And, just as Stephen Fletcher hopes, *NHS The Musical* is a fitting tribute from one industry that has faced significant challenges over the past year or so, to another. Upbeat and quirky, it's everything you expect and love about an unabashed show such as this; making no attempt to be something it's not, or apologise for what it is: a gloriously entertaining, yet surprisingly informative look at the NHS through a complex set of eyes - one eye on the 'long term plan', another on the reality of its intricate nature.

The show begs us to think long and hard about what we'd be without it. We might complain, it is certainly flawed, over stretched and underfunded, but we'd be poorer without her loving embrace from our delicate cradles to our inevitable graves.



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Running until Saturday 25th September, if you have even once felt thankful for what we so often take for granted, make sure you catch this timely look at what makes us as a nation unique.

In the words of the late, great founder, Nye Bevan, "*The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it*". So let's fight!



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