

Review: Fisherman's Friends

By Amber Roderick

***Fisherman's Friends* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

An uplifting, unique, warm show, based on the true story of the singing Cornish fishermen. The real Fisherman's Friends are a folk music group from Port Isaac who sing beautiful sea shanties. The 2019 film may have been a hit, but *Fisherman's Friends: The Musical* is an absolute treat. Making its world premiere in Truro's Hall for Cornwall last year, Theatre Royal Plymouth is the UK tour's first stop!

In a Cornish village, a group of local pub-goers who enjoy singing together maybe hoped to raise a bit of money for charity. But when an unlikely guest at the local B&B hears them singing the songs they have enjoyed singing for generations, he's amazed by their sound. Londoner Danny Anderson, played by Jason Langley, winds up in the Golden Lion, but it's not just the cheap pints he finds incredible. He hears something special in their harmonies and offers to be their manager.

As well as the stunning music, the story holds an interesting narrative for our South West residents, with heated discussions surrounding second homes, British tourists and keeping the community pub afloat. Even though the Cornishmen might make jokes about hating Devon, with mentions of places like Padstow and Newquay, it's written perfectly for Plymothians who want a little giggle. Not forgetting the narrative of real-life issues surrounding debt, early motherhood and finding your place in the world.

Alwyn, played by Parisa Shahmir, is the daughter of one of the fishermen; a big personality, strong, loveable, but most of all, possesses a stunning voice of her own. As the knowledgeable local, who has only travelled as far as Plymouth, she carries the story. As well as the fantastic sea shanties, Alwyn smashes out some pretty mesmerising songs of her own.

With a cosy yet grand set based in the village pub, the audience feels welcomed as a local thanks to director James Grieve. The production somehow makes an energetic and busy show feel intimate. A cast full of diversity means you will always have something to smile at, laugh at or identify with. The real Fisherman's Friends won The Good Tradition Award for keeping folk music alive and bringing it to new audiences at the 2011 BBC Radio Folk Awards. Now, a whole new group of onlookers have the pleasure of hearing their story up close.

The fishermen may make you smile, laugh or even cry, but their bond when they sing together steals the show. A feelgood musical about community, love, music and friendships. A heart-warming story of a very unlikely buoy-band.