

Engaging celebration exploring friendship

Review by Brian Owen

AMELIA Bullmore's *Di and Viv and Rose* is one of those rare plays that appears to be one thing and quietly becomes another.

It opens with the breezy charm of a student comedy that sees three young women sharing a house in 1963 and ends somewhere far deeper and more resonant in 2010.

Bullmore, with her trademark blend of wit and emotional acuity, traces how friendships forged at 18 can steady us, surprise us and sometimes break us as the decades unfold.

Di, Viv and Rose meet as freshers — three mismatched personalities navigating awkward beginnings.

Di is the grounded, athletic one, negotiating her sexuality with a mix of courage and vulnerability.

Viv is fiercely articulate and politically alert, her sense of purpose almost a form of armour.

Rose is the open-hearted romantic who is warm, chaotic and instantly magnetic.

Their chemistry feels lived in from the start.

Bullmore's early scenes sparkle.

The humour is sharp, the rhythms natural and the affection between the characters utterly believable.

You laugh because you recognise these women and you care because Bullmore renders their flaws as vividly as their joys.

But the play's real strength lies in its tonal shifts.

Life intrudes, as it always does, with ambition, love, disappointment and the sudden, devastating turns adulthood specialises in.

Bullmore's career has honed her instinct for dialogue that feels true, funny and unforced.

A cast featuring Alexandra Whitworth, Sarah Feltham and Millicent Golightly promises rich contrasts. Whitworth's classical clarity suits Viv's intellectual steel, Feltham's screen-honed immediacy brings quiet depth to Di and Golightly's warmth and physical expressiveness make Rose glow.

Bullmore's writing thrives on ensemble balance and these three offer exactly that.

Di and Viv and Rose is ultimately a celebration not of perfect friendship but also of the real thing — messy, sustaining, sometimes painful, always transformative.

In a theatre landscape crowded with noise Bullmore's truthfulness feels like a gift.

It's a thoroughly engaging evening and well worth seeking out.

The production runs until Saturday at Malvern's Coach House Theatre.

■ Brian Owen reviewed the play on Monday, February 23.