**In The Heights at Southwark Playhouse | Theatre review**

In its hundred-year history only 10 musicals have been nominated for a Pulitzer. Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *In The Heights* is one of them. It won four Tonys and became a Broadway phenomenon in 2008, and now it makes its UK premiere at Southwark Playhouse.

Blue spotlights break through the haze to reveal corrugated iron shutters, splattered with graffiti and held up by bricks and scaffolding. This is Washington Heights, this is the *barrio*. It’s a lively medley of Dominicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans. But in Washington Heights everyone’s a bit down on their luck: Usnavi runs a bodega and looks after his ailing *abuela*; Nina has lost her scholarship at Stanford, forcing her mum and dad’s cab business into further financial hardship; Daniela’s salon is closing down. They sing their stories with a mix of hip hop, rap, salsa, *son Cubano*. Maracas shake, trumpets and saxophones bring bursts of bright colour to the fizzing score.

There’s sex appeal for everyone: women in ridiculously tight dresses and men with ridiculously tight abs (both with plenty of cleavage on show) all dance to Drew McOnie’s relentless, vigorous choreography – lithe hips, body pops, salsa dance. This choreography beautifully conjures up a crowded, vibrant *barrio*. It is particularly effective, and impressive, during the first act finale that plays out all the tensions and relationships that have been building up during Act 1 and fills the small Southwark Playhouse stage to bursting point.

All the members of the cast under Luke Sheppard’s direction and all the musicians under Tom Deering’s musical supervision danced, sang, acted and played brilliantly to bring some summer excitement, and not a little sweat, to an otherwise sultry day. Victoria Hamilton-Barritt puts in an especially beguiling turn as Daniela, squeezed tightly into a red dress and perched on high stilettos, with perfect hair, perfect make up, perfect posture and an intense sass and dryness to her delivery that makes the audience laugh at every line she speaks.

With utter joy and apparent ease *In The Heights* brings to London the intense heat of the *barrio*, but also the vibrancy and vitality of the neighbourhood, the sense of community and, above all, the love that these families and these friends share in their most strained moments. Every song is a climax, every routine an explosion of colour and movement. This is a heart-warming, happy-making, feel-good summer hit.

**Verdict: 5 stars**

***Timothy Bano***

In The Heights *is on at Southwark Playhouse until 7th June 2014, for further information and to book visit* [*here*](http://southwarkplayhouse.co.uk/index.php/the-large/in-the-heights//)*.*

Proposed quote: *“a heart-warming, happy-making, feel-good summer hit”*

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