

Theatre review: Snookered

(****)

☒ In an anonymous town in northern England, four Asian friends meet for their annual memorial pool evening to mark the anniversary of the death of schoolmate T. Billy has made a special trip back home from London; Shaf has a money-making plan he needs to share with Billy; Kamy has big ideas for his father's butchery business; and Mo is trying to live down his reputation for devoutness by knocking back tequilas.

The merciless banter flows thick and fast. But as the evening progresses and the empty shot glasses mount up, old resentments resurface and secrets are revealed that call the foursome's friendship into question, and expose the stalking despair behind the lads' cocky bravado.

Not that *Snookered* from London-based theatre company Tamasha is a tough watch. Quite the opposite, it's full of laughs and a wicked sense of humour, in this high-energy yet grounded production from director Iqbal Khan.

In fact, it's hard to believe that it's only Middlesbrough-based writer Ishy Din's first commissioned play, so assured is his writing. He has a fantastic ear for authentic blokey put-downs, yet he also has superb control of light and shade, taking delight in leaving his audience dangling as he suddenly reveals the dark significance behind a gag.

☒ He's unflinchingly honest in his portrayal of British ☒ Asian life, covering everything from mosque drug dealing to casual racism, extremism to arranged marriage. Yet it's all done with an ease and a lightness of touch that ensure that the play never sounds preachy, just true.

The performances by the tight-knit cast are vivid and hugely committed. Muzz Khan stands out as the larger-than-life Shaf,

all posturing swagger one minute that dissolves into fragile neediness the next. Jaz Deol is assured and confident as the peacemaker Billy, which only makes his revelations about an emotional encounter with his estranged mother all the more shattering.

Asif Khan brings out the broad humour in Kamy's doomed ideas for his father's butchery shop, yet there's a touching poignancy about his wide-eyed hopes for the future. And Peter Singh's Mo might relish his position as deputy manager at the local Comet, but he's only too aware of the despair lurking in the shadows of his life.

Ciaran Bagnall's bar-room set reaches right into the front row of Traverse 2, so from the start you feel immersed in the action. This is an urgent, honest yet thoroughly entertaining play whose themes of identity, masculinity, discrimination and hope take its relevance way beyond its specific setting.

[Snookered](#) is at the Traverse Theatre until Saturday 18 February 2012