

Review: Fat Friends the Musical ****



Some of the recent shows at the Edinburgh Playhouse that I have reviewed for The Edinburgh Reporter have been American High School orientated. While they've mostly been enjoyable I have to say I can't really relate to such a genre. However, this week sees *Fat Friends The Musical* arrive in the capital for a three-day run – a musical full of Yorkshire wit, love and never-say-die attitudes.

Fat Friends is written by Kay Mellor, one of this country's finest writers. It began life as a comedy drama on ITV towards the end of 2000 and would launch the careers of the likes of Ruth Jones and James Corden. Now, Mellor has adapted the show for a musical and with Nick Lloyd Webber – son of Andrew – providing the musical element of the production, *Fat Friends The Musical* was bound to be a hit. And, on the evidence of Thursday's opening night at the Edinburgh Playhouse it is.

The story tells of young Kelly, brilliantly played by Jodie Prenger who has appeared on television shows such as *Casualty* and *Waterloo Road*. Kelly's battle to lose weight before her wedding to Kevin, played by Joel Montague, is the theme of the show and she encapsulates the spirit of a Yorkshire lass, swearing whilst being interviewed live on television after the manager of a slimming club, Super Slimmers – Julie Fleshman played stylishly by Natasha Hamilton, perhaps best known for being one third of the pop group Atomic Kitten – offers to pay not only for her yearned for wedding dress but the wedding itself.

Fleshman challenges Kelly to drop two dress sizes in six weeks but has devious public relations motives for setting such an unreasonable target and is determined to see it through, not by fair means but foul.

The Super Slimmers Team Leader, Lauren, is played by Natalie Anderson, once of the ITV soap *Emmerdale* and she is another who gives a convincing performance and her love for the vicar Paul, played by Jonathan Halliwell, is a side show to the main event but engrossing nonetheless.

There are also notable performances from two well-known stars of stage and screen. Scotland's own Elaine C Smith gives a typically ebullient display as Kelly's mum Betty and it's gratifying to see Mellor deciding not to have Smith give a false Yorkshire accent but retain the Glasgow twang she does so well.

There is a poignant scene in Act 2 between Betty and her hubby Fergus – played by Kevin Kennedy, who many people will recall playing Curly Watts in another ITV soap *Coronation Street*. Kennedy has a decent singing voice and he and Smith clearly hit it off together. Playing the owner of a chip shop does little to encourage his daughter to lose weight – Kelly's remorse at having had a chip butty resonated with the audience.

Observing as a [hypnotherapist](#), someone who helps people to lose weight, I could see much of the audience empathise with Kelly's plight. How many of us have tried to lose weight but have either failed or not managed to keep it off? This is, perhaps, why this show is such a hit as many people can relate to its story.

Fat Friends remains true to its working-class roots but doesn't make fun of anyone and gives a heart-warming message that you don't have to be a size 8 to be attractive. Love and happiness comes in all shapes and sizes – and the world is a better place for that.

Fat Friends the Musical is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until Saturday 21st April. Tickets [here](#).

Edinburgh Reporter rating: ****

Here is our video interview with Kay Mellor

[A chat with Kay Mellor – writer of Fat Friends](#) from [The Edinburgh Reporter On Vimeo](#) on [Vimeo](#).