



STILL BENDING IT

The stage takes another film, adds choreography, and a score with an Indian kick. Story by **Matthew Myers**.

YOU CAN BET that somewhere in the world right now, a feel-good musical is taking place, making audiences feel wonderful about life.

Bend It Like Beckham is another film turned stage musical, in the same vein as *Billy Elliot*, *The Full Monty* and *Strictly Ballroom*. Having launched in May, its popularity is already surging with critics calling it “life-affirming” and a “bold British triumph!”

Based on the 2002 movie, one would expect success, given its

social messages of race, culture and sexuality. Above all, it tells the story of a young girl overcoming adversity. Granted this has been done before, but the reason this formula wins is because so many relate to it. Everyone has dreams!

The main reason *Bend It Like Beckham* transfers so well from screen to stage is that original writer/director Gurinder Chadha is at the helm. Initially Chadha resisted calls to turn her movie into a musical, but after considering

how times have changed and feeling that race relations needed a positive boost, she gave it a go.

On stage the story is the same. Teenager Jesmindra “Jess” Bhamra loves playing football, along with her best friend Jules, but faces resistance from her Punjabi Indian parents who expect an education followed by marriage. There’s a love triangle, and while Jess’ hero is soccer legend David Beckham, there is a very real chance she can also follow her own dreams in

Some critics feel the show lacks the film’s grittier edge, but the social commentary is still strong in songs such as *People Like Us*, where Jess’ father, played by Tony Jayawardena, highlights how prejudice ruined his own dreams. A gay cousin, Tony (Jamal Andreas), and Jules’ mother (Sophie-Louise Dann), provide the comic relief.

Reflective our times, the musical has opened doors for actors who might otherwise have been marginalised and it premiered

“ Based on the 2002 movie, the musical draws on **stories around race, culture and sexuality**. ”

joining a women’s soccer team.

The movie made stars of Parminder Nagra, Keira Knightley and Jonathan Rhys Meyers, but the stage cast brings a unique flavor and truly own their roles. Starring is Natalie Dew who has already made a name for herself appearing in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet* and *Romeo And Juliet*. Lauren Samuels (*We Will Rock You*) plays Jules, and Jamie Campbell from *The Twilight Saga*, plays coach Joe – though he’s no longer Irish.

the same week the FIFA Women’s World Cup.

As for Becks, the soccer star gave it the full thumbs up, kindly giving permission for the use of his name. Director Gurinder Chadha continues her winning streak – *Bend It Like Beckham* indeed kicks a winning goal.

MORE: *Bend It Like Beckham* is playing at the Phoenix Theatre, London. For more visit: www.benditlikebeckhamthemusical.co.uk



Natalie Dew as Jess and Jamal Andréas (right) as gay uncle Tony in the London production of *Bend It Like Beckham*.

