

Ladies' Day

August 11, 2017 | By [Hugh Simpson](#) | [Reply](#) [More](#)

★★★★☆ **Good each-way bet**

Saughtonhall United Reformed Church (Venue 273): *Mon 7 – Sat 12 Aug 2017*

Review by Hugh Simpson

Saughtonhall Drama Club's *Ladies' Day* has warm humour, the odd spiky line and a finely put together production.

Four fish-gutters make the trip to Ladies' Day at Royal Ascot in 2005 – which is when it was relocated to York for one year – each hoping for different things



Ladies' Day Fish Gutters. Pic: Sarah Howley

There is more than a hint of Victoria Wood's *Dinnerladies* about some of Amanda Whittington's play, while not all of the transposing of the original setting from Hull to Musselburgh comes off. It certainly makes the journey to and from York races in one day a bit of a schlep – and on the bus too.

On the whole, making the central characters Scottish works. What it cannot do is disguise the predictability of the script. Almost every development is signposted a mile off, with the exception of one bizarre left turn towards the end that is frankly baffling.

What does shine through is how beautifully drawn the four central characters are, and the number of genuinely funny lines they get. The best thing about this production is how delicately and convincingly they are portrayed.

Louise Starkey's Shelley, eager for fame but with no talent of any kind, is wonderfully brassy and brittle. Candice Sullivan gives ingenuous, Tony Christie-obsessed Linda a quiet sadness.

razor-sharp characterisation

Eleanor Watson's Pearl, facing a caravan-bound early retirement, is endlessly subtle, while Chris Mitchell, as devoted single mother Jan, provides a razor-sharp characterisation, as well as some glorious moments of inebriation



Ladies Day race-goers. Pic: Sarah Howley

Director Elizabeth Wilson oversees some lovely interplay from the quartet, as well as providing an understated, beautifully functional set.

In this story of female solidarity, tensions and frustration, the male characters are purely secondary, but fit in well. Alan Moonie gives Joe, the fish factory foreman, a sympathetically crumpled air. Murray Petrie's ticket tout and John Webster's gambler both know to step back and let the women take centre stage. Gavin Watson's bookie does his best with an exceptionally odd scene, while Scott Kerr's jockey is an oddly touching performance.

Colin Mitchell gives bumptious life to a sleazy, tic-tac obsessed racing commentator called Jim McCormack, who undoubtedly bears no resemblance to any real person living or dead.

There is a warm humour here – perhaps too warm, as most of the potential sharp edges are planed away rather too soon. That, however, is the fault of the play, not of this production, which in terms of straightforward enjoyment scores very highly indeed.

Running time: 2 hours 10 minutes (including one interval)