

THE SCOTSMAN - SEPTEMBER, 2004

Dying For It - September 2004

In A week when a new survey revealed unprecedented levels of misery among British teenagers, it's a salutary experience to see this latest touring production from Scottish Youth Theatre, playing at Ullapool tonight and at Gilmorehill G12 in Glasgow over the weekend.

Written by David Cosgrove after workshop sessions and performed by a 15-strong youth company, Dying For It is a complex play about sex and risk among a group of school-leavers somewhere in Scotland; and if it has a fault, it lies in the huge range of problems it tackles and in the number of characters it tries to develop. There's virginal Natalie, gay Enzo, vulnerable Shona, good-time-girl Jackie, chirpy narrator Jamie, and a dozen others. Their stories interact in a pattern of attraction and rejection, power-play and risk; and sometimes the narrative almost grinds to a halt under the weight of its complexity.

The show's achievement, though, lies in the sense that it almost cuts out the adult mediators who normally impose their views and values on this subject, as young actors talk to young audiences about their struggle to negotiate a world that bombards them with sexual imagery and opportunity, yet remains hopelessly tongue-tied about the deep human and emotional consequences of sex.

Mary McCluskey's direction combines rock-solid integrity with slickness and flair. And although the show involves an element of education, there's a sense that it comes straight from the heart of a brave but confused generation, to others who find themselves in the same troubled place.