

'It's hard, but I've never had a Plan B'

Despite breaking through on *The X Factor* and charting a number one album, Diana Vickers is changing course to chase her original dream of acting. Ahead of her new show, *Hatched 'n' Dispatched*, she told Alex Bellotti why she could only ever be a performer

As *The X Factor* returns for another series, it naturally brings up memories of past successes, and the story of Diana Vickers is up there with the best. As a starry-eyed, bare-footed 16-year-old, she charmed the panel of Simon Cowell, Louis Walsh and Cheryl Fernandez-Versini in her first audition, before going on to reaching the semi-finals of the contest back in 2009.

The bookies' favourite throughout much of the run, her popularity continued to soar after leaving the show, with her debut single, *Once*, and album, *Songs from the Tainted Cherry Tree*, both soaring to number one in the UK music charts. Having dreamed of being an actress since her earliest years, however, she's now stepping back from her singing career to pursue her love of the theatre, and is soon to appear in the Park Theatre's latest show, *Hatched 'n' Dispatched*.

"I'm a performer; I've had it in my blood since I was young," says Vickers. "I went on *The X Factor*, but I always said, 'I'll do music when I'm younger but eventually I want to knuckle down and be an actress. It is scary, but there's never really been another option for me."

Also starring Wendi Peters and Vicki Binns, *Hatched 'n' Dispatched* charts the fortunes of the Needham family, who have buried their uncle Arthur and christened their new baby in a double booking at the local church. As Dorothy-Mavis, the overbearing "queen bee" of the family, takes charge of preparations for the after party, the scene slowly snowballs in tension as the dark secrets and mysteries of the family begin to unravel, with Vickers' young,



■ Diana Vickers in rehearsals for *Hatched 'n' Dispatched*

rebellious character, Susan, proving particularly provocative.

"It's very funny and heart-warming, but it's also very heart-wrenching and there's some really upsetting scenes, so it's a bit of an emotional rollercoaster watching it," explains the 24-year-old. "All [Susan] is bothered about is fellas and sex and having a good time; it's the 1950s and she's pregnant so it's a bit scandalous. She represents youth and she's quite a modern woman, except she doesn't really know what she wants to do."

Vickers made her professional acting debut in 2009 when she appeared in a West End revival of

Jim Cartwright's *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*. Having picked up plaudits for her versatile musical performance in the lead role, she went on to appear in Sky's six-part comedy series *Give Out Girls* in 2013, before returning to the West End alongside Ben Miller in *The Duck House*, a political satire about the 2009 expenses scandal.

With her acting career clearly beginning to blossom, she admits it's left her music on the back burner. "I've not really thought about my music for a while, when I go in the studio I'll write, but I haven't got any plans. I just want to concentrate on my acting, it's really hard, it's really tiring, it's

really emotionally draining, so it needs a lot of attention."

Furthermore, the performer reveals that while she tries to catch *The X Factor* from time to time, she certainly hasn't got the "X Factor Fever".

Increasingly, she feels distanced from the prodigious youngster she was first announced to the world as, and says that in her acting career particularly, the status the talent show gave her can only take her so far.

"It did me well that show and it was a great platform, but it was so long ago now. I did it when I was so young – I was only 16 – so I don't feel very connected in terms

of when I see it, it brings back all these emotions.

"It's difficult because I've been in countless meetings and it doesn't really help you that you have a name or come from that kind of show. Sometimes it might, but in acting, if you're not funny, you're not funny and you're not going to get the job. I don't think anyone's doing me any favours just because I was on that show and I'm getting the roles because I'm working hard for them – it's actually a really good feeling."

■ *Hatched 'n' Dispatched* runs until September 26 at the Park Theatre. Visit parktheatre.co.uk

Clumsy look at Broadway's Jewish history is saved by toe-tapping nostalgia

YOU WON'T SUCCEED ON BROADWAY IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY JEWS
ST JAMES THEATRE
★★☆☆☆

Lacking the shrewd lampooning instincts of *Spamalot*, from which it takes its name, this revue is a muddle: too solemn for satire, too grandiloquent for cabaret, and too fractured for musical theatre.

Cheap video clips – essentially a school project cribbed from Wikipedia – skate over Broadway history, from the 1930s to present day, and its gifted Jewish composers. Without those guys, there'd probably be no showbusiness, is the hazy

conclusion.

The premise reaches breaking point in later years, turning to Disney and cancelled TV drama *Smash* – hardly comparable with Gershwin or Irving Berlin.

So, best to ignore creator/directors Michaela Stern and Daniel Donskoy's ill-conceived framing altogether and focus on the affectionate delivery of indelible standards from a mostly young, up-and-coming cast.

Granted, removing songs from narrative context does result in some soulless, Glee-like renditions, all big smiles and jazz hands, and the decision to separate disciplines – static singers competing with distracting dancers – seems odd for what should be a celebration of the



triple threat.

But there are some gems. Natalie Lippin is light, bright and witty in "The Lady is a Tramp", while

Sophie Evans (runner-up in Lloyd Webber's Dorothy talent search) produces a pensive, folksy "Over the Rainbow" – though focus is

pulled by a clunky pas de deux.

Mama Rose is inexplicably cross-cast, but Danny Lane commits impressively. Sarah Earnshaw gives a comic masterclass in Sondheim's mile-a-minute "Getting Married Today", and the veterans show how it's done: original *Les Mis* cast member Jackie Marks still has chops, while the assured John Barr provides the evening's highpoint in "Be Our Guest".

There's little invention, with workman-like pastiche from choreographer Chris Whittaker, and no insight into Jewish creative history, but toe-tapping nostalgia decently delivered by a promising company.

Marianka Swain