

WHAT'S ON DANCE

An electrifying, raw and funny coming of age tale that hurts

DANCE NATION

ALMEIDA THEATRE

★★★★☆

Clare Barron's electrifying play is a funny, poignant and wild portrait of coming-of-age that is defiantly and candidly female.

It follows a preteen competitive dance troupe in small-town Ohio, teasing genre tropes (echoes of A Chorus Line and Strictly Ballroom), but is ultimately more raw and adventurous.

At its heart is the fraught friendship between Amina and Zuzu – the latter never quite as good a dancer, despite relentless maternal pressure.

Karla Crome is superb as Amina, realising the challenges of owning her talent and will to win, while Ria Zmitrowicz's Zuzu is heart-breaking, literally spilling blood.

Barron's piece is also hilarious, particularly via 'Dance Teacher

Marianka Swain is thrilled by this defiantly female story of a preteen dance troupe that beautifully explores the fragility of young womanhood

Pat'. Brendan Cowell nails the self-seriousness, talking of events like the Boogie Down Grand Prix with religious awe, and announcing that he's "making the future" via his acro-lyrical tribute to, er, Ghandi.

But Barron never mocks the girls' investment in dance, nor the belief in their ability to change the world. And yet, via the all-ages casting, we glimpse their older versions, tragically devoid of fearlessness.



The cast of Dance Nation picture: Marc Brenner

Kayla Meikle delivers a storming monologue as Ashlee, the girl who knows she's beautiful, brilliant, could do anything, and yet already understanding that – as a woman – she can't own that confidence out loud.

There's also lovely work from Sarah Hadland's know-it-all Sofia, Irfan Shamji's halting Luke, and

Nancy Crane's sweet, dreamy Maeve.

Bijan Sheibani nicely handles the tonal variety, including several primal fantasy sequences and – via Samal Blak's revolving mirrors – delivers some surprising, striking images.

Aline David's organic movement is wonderfully expressive.

Most refreshingly, there's no shame in this portrait of female physicality. Menstrual blood is war paint, and there's a bold curiosity that feels all the more precious for its fragility – soon lost to social pressure and adolescence.

Thrilling and necessary theatre.
Marianka Swain

Last Night A Speed Date Changed My Life

Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen introduces a new dating event which puts music at the front and centre. The first edition of Last Night a Speed Date Changed My Life will take place next week.

If you are a) single and b) a big music fan, then you'll swiftly need to cancel any plans you've made on Tuesday September 11.

Arriving to shake up east London's speed-dating scene is Last Night a Speed Date Changed My Life, an evening of music, singing, drinking and mingling at Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen.

"Simply bring your headphones and come prepared with your desert island playlist," says event founder Liat Chen.

"We provide a double headphone connector from which you'll share the tunes you love with other attendees over some drinks.

"The traditional speed-dating rules still apply, so you'll get a quick four minute date with each person before gents jump to the next table when the time is up."

In news other than the fact that water is wet and grass is green, speed-dating events can be awkward sometimes. But with the

challenge of small-talk greatly reduced in favour of bonding over some tunes, this is a playful and relaxed way to meet new people. "We wanted to start a music-focused dating night so people remember that it's possible to meet people in real life, and not just on Tinder!" continues Liat.

"We're leading the revolution against just using dating apps. This will be a much better place to tell the Grandkids you met at rather than on Tinder or Bumble. "It's a quick, painless way of dating and forging real connections with other like-minded people." After meeting each date and bonding over a mutual love of Fleetwood Mac, Michael Jackson, Linkin Park or Drake (or, you know, not), hosts will collect your confidential sheets and notify attendees of their mutual matches within 48 hours.

Last Night a Speed Date Changed My Life at Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen, Tuesday September 11 from 6pm to 8pm. Individual tickets are £15, or you can get a Guys + Girls bundle for £25



The Hoxton Square Bar and Kitchen where speed date nights aim to get music fans together