

Unsettling exploration of rape culture and trial by social media

MACHO BOASTS:
Venetia Bowe,
Lauren Coe and
Darragh Shannon in
Louise O'Neill's
Asking for It



'This is practically a re-run of the scenes that led to the recent rugby rape trial'



SHARING: Venetia Bowe, Síle Maguire, Lauren Coe and Amy McElhatton obsessed with social media

A SCREAMING INDICTMENT OF THE WAY WOMEN ARE TREATED

Louise O'Neill's novel, adapted by Meadhbh McHugh, is deeply disturbing and emotionally powerful, and while I'd like to think it could have an effect on the treatment of women, and on the whole culture surrounding sexual relationships, I'm not too confident. Consent has become the not-totally-honest buzz word about sexual intercourse. Since sex has become just another social activity – on a par with dining out or having a stroll in the park – the refusal of consent can be interpreted as laughably outdated behaviour unworthy of a modern woman. An American academic has written that when she refused sex on a date, she was told: 'I would like to hear your

MICHAEL MOFFATT
SHOW OF THE WEEK

Asking For It
Abbey Theatre

Until Nov 24 - sold out ★★★★★

reason, but it had better be a good one.' TV comedy, pop music and comedians preach the same lesson. A vivid dance in the play, performed by all the performers is almost a homage to hedonism. This supercharged production

by Landmark and the Everyman, in association with the Abbey and Cork Midsummer Festival, features Emma, a local beauty who treats some of her female school friends with contempt, provokes jealousy among them, and is lusted after by the macho, oversexed footballing males. The play is practically a re-run of the scenes that led to the recent rugby rape trial.

At a weekend party, Ella who, believes that at 18 she can do what she wants, accepts drugs, is raped, brutalised and dumped outside the house. The horror of the attack takes on a hideous new dimension in the second half when she's shamed through videos and on Facebook. Her family has to share in her humiliation and suffer painful consequences. The small

world of the home, that she was so keen to leave, has become a prison from which there's no escape, branded permanently as she is by her triumphant attackers.

Lauren Coe captures all Emma's arrogance and vulnerability in an unforgettably restrained performance.

A great deal of the play is done in recorded voices, those of Emma and others involved in the attack, along with the censorious voices from radio phone-ins. The more ugly aspects are conveyed in shimmering, distorted images, using the set as a kind of perspex glass-house divided into different rooms. In fact, Emma's voice-over narration of the trauma and the effects on her, give an immediacy to the events that's more forceful than the dramatised scenes

at home, where the dialogue and acting are occasionally ropey. It falls to Emma's brother (Paul Mescal) to spell out the need to risk further shame by insisting on legal action. Taken as a whole, the play is a screaming indictment of the way women are turned into disposable sexual objects.