

# BLOODLESS

**Marianka Swain** wanted more guts from *Carrie: The Musical* at Southwark Playhouse on May 6

In 1988, the RSC's critically mauled musical version of Stephen King's iconic *Carrie* became one of Broadway's most notorious flops, lasting just 21 performances and losing nearly \$8 million. A heavily revised version now braves critics at the Southwark Playhouse, an intimate venue that suits this stripped-down – and watered-down – reincarnation.

Awash with self-conscious contemporary references, this *Carrie* is a very millennial horror story. The tormenting of its eponymous telekinetic teenage misfit (Evelyn Hoskins) comes with a large dollop of selfies and social



media, while the earnest song-and-dance treatise on the evils of bullying evokes *High School Musical* and *Glee*.

Gary Lloyd's energetic production suits this accessible approach, but fails to deliver the necessary darkness. His buoyantly choreographed mean girls are more sassy than sinister, and there's a jarring tonal shift between the peppy adolescent numbers and Lawrence D Cohen's disturbing domestic scenes, where Carrie is subject to sexual repression and escalating abuse from her religious fanatic mother (Kim Criswell).



A mainly young and universally impressive

ensemble overcomes some of the source material's flaws, committing sincerely to the root emotions of the piece. There is nothing revelatory in Michael Gore's bland 1980s pop/rock score or Dean Pitchford's facile lyrics, but Hoskins' gripping transformation from quivering, hunched victim, wide eyes broadcasting agony and yearning, to blossoming woman and finally blazing agent of vengeance adds much-needed depth.

Both she and Criswell boast soaring, richly expressive vocals, though the latter can't entirely reconcile an empathetic reading

with the inherent melodrama of her monstrous Bible-thumper.

There are strong supporting turns from newcomer Gabriella Williams (pictured above right) as the spiteful ringleader, Jodie Jacobs' compassionate gym teacher, Dex Lee's delinquent, and conscience-stricken pair Sarah McNicholas and Greg Miller-Burns.

Tim McQuillen-Wright's claustrophobic, naturalistic design is effectively juxtaposed with Jeremy Chernick's supernatural special effects, and the infamous prom scene doesn't stint on the splatter. But this *Carrie* never truly shocks, keeping its horror safely contained within homilies. ●