



## **Release The Beat (Arcola Theatre, Hackney)**

Verdict: Hip-hop musical is  
ring-a-ding-ding

★★★★☆

■ **LET'S** hear it for the Arcola Theatre in Hackney. Its latest show has all the makings of a serious musical. Well, all except one: cash.

Serious musicals soak up serious money, as any West End producer will moan to you. But the essence of it can still be done on a shoestring, and that's what Mehmet Ergen's production proves at this fringe theatre converted from a former sweat shop.

Judith Johnson's storyline, very loosely based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, tells the tale of a young girl who's been abandoned by her mother, falls in love with a DJ and elopes to Ibiza.

Meanwhile, Karl Lewkowicz's music and lyrics attempt to marry *Fiddler On The Roof* with hip-hop and house music, using a clanking upright piano and an electronic drum kit. It's hardly going to seduce local rudeboys, but for anyone else it's big-hearted fun.

Moreover, the kids who perform the show are an outstandingly congenial posse. Rosalind James is a sweet, pouting 18-year-old wanting to sacrifice her A-levels for the love of her life, Will Smith lookalike DJ Winston.

Pieter Lawman, Winston's deadly rival, is an old Etonian DJ, a scrawny gangsta speaking street patois and affecting a hoodlum limp. Bling it ain't; otherwise it's bang on the money.