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Incorporating THE EVENING NEWS

The Bard bigs it up in clubland

THEATRE

Release the Beat

Arcola, E8

Fiona Mountford

THAT the plots of Shakespeare have a universal and time-defying relevance is confirmed once more by this exuberant new musical, in which the bare bones of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are transposed to the summer club worlds of London and Ibiza.

There are four mixed-up young lovers, an irate parent and an otherworldly master of ceremonies, but the drug of choice is a chemical rather than a natural remedy.

For 18-year-old Simone, the promise of a weekend at her Dad's club on the Balearic island has long been the carrot at the end of the stick of exams. However, Dad has now decreed that final revision, rather than partying, should be at the top of Simone's playlist, leaving would-be boyfriend Winston, best friend Dionne and Dionne's potential suitor Tom — previously keen on Simone — to go it alone.

Judith Johnson's book sets up a dynamic situation, but lacks the courage to broaden and deepen Simone and Dionne's romantic plights. As played by Rosalind James and Zabrina Norry, in Mehmet Ergen's pacy production, these two fresh-faced, sweet-voiced, sentimentally old-fashioned teenagers are more Mallory Towers than participants in all-night dance marathons.

It is left to Karl Lewkowicz's excellent, if somewhat hybrid, music and lyrics to convey the energy of clubland, with sterling support from choreographer Mykal Rand, who moves the attitude-packed 19-strong cast confidently across the long stage.

Golda Rosheuvel's charismatic Puck-like Lady Luck gives a fine statement of Lewkowicz's intent with the opening number *Big Up* and the titular song is insistently memorable. Others have an incongruous air of *Oliver-meets-Les-Misérables* about them.

It does *Release the Beat* no discredit to say that it currently appears to be the first draft of a potentially big-hitting show.

● *Until 21 August. Information: 020 7503 1646.*