

A favourite venue here in London, for our theatre viewing pleasure, is Arcola by Dalston. This year they are in the midst of a Spanish play series, which don't much interest either of us, but also host *In Skagway*, by KTR Productions & Irish theatre company GÁna Nua. This four-hander, all-woman show by Karen Ardiff, directed by Russell Bolam, occupies the small Studio 2 space.



This is a story of four women in Alaska at the end of a late 19th century gold rush, in the lonely village of Skagway, as the claims have been spent. May (Geraldine Alexander) is taking care of her sister Frankie (Angeline Ball) following the latter's stroke. Frankie is a faded dance hall performer who had also relied on prostitution to get by, May her younger (?) sister who follows her slavishly from Ireland to New York to Alaska — and all points between — fawning over her and taking whatever scraps may fall to the floor, be it food, funds or men. T-Belle (Kathy Rose O'Brien) is May's daughter, a miner herself, and as we learn the issue of Frankie's one-time pimp, to whom she had sold May for a night or two. The script has its moments, but is in general a confused muddle with May's worship of her sister the only apparent motivation for half the action that unfolds. We're given hints as to the origins of this madness, but not enough to be able to sort it out satisfactorily. Adding to our confusion is the age indifferent casting. May looks quite a bit older than Frankie, but the script seems to imply she's younger. Frankie is a vivacious young woman, but described as a wretched old krone by T-Belle. T-Belle returns from weeks in the wilderness, of mining and frolicking with her Indian lover, Joe, but looks ready for a night on the town with her plucked eyebrows and perfect face.



A breath of reality comes in the form of Natasha Starkey in the role of Nelly, a local barmaid and dancer with whom T-Belle tries to hatch a scheme. Starkey is believable in the role, and provides a depth to the performance which seems lacking elsewhere. Not that Ball, Alexander and O'Brien turn in poor performances, but they have great heights to scale to overcome the casting, make-up and costuming choices which have left them at a distinct disadvantage. Not our best night at the theatre, I dare say.

A special note, too, for Arcola. This small studio could be a nice space, but the seating is atrocious. This 87 minute, one act play was about a half hour too long for one to sit comfortably on these terrible plank benches. There have been nice improvements elsewhere in the facility — the new toilets, well appointed bar and evolving lobby — but the seating in the studio is in desperate need of upgrading. I shan't come back here until that's been done.