



Grace Saif (left) and Millicent Wong (right, above) are Mary Wallace and “Athena,” respectively, a pair of high schoolers practicing fencing in preparation for Nationals. Following a bruising match won by Athena, she proposes to Mary Wallace that they commit to regular practice together. Thus begins this taut 80 minute romp through fencing and teenage girlhood.

The show was born in Brooklyn, but has been refined and adapted for presentation here in England, as part of an NT Women of Tomorrow Directors Award series. The action still set in New York, but the script by Gracie Gardner has seen work. Grace Gummer, directing, makes up the third Grace of this production.

Some have described this as a comedy, but I think that does a disservice. There are many light and funny moments in the show, but it mainly explores the inner lives of these two 17 year old women as they struggle against family expectations, peer pressure, social anxiety, and all the rest of the lot which befall young women today. Their fencing, and their growing reliance on each other, is the part of their world over which they exercise near total control. It is there that we find them, oddly enough, with their guard down.

Pawn is no fencing expert, but it sure looks like these folks have done their homework. The practice routines are tight and refined, the pre- and post-match stretches and exercises convincing. At the end of the piece is a match, and for 20 minutes or so we are held rapt with some of the smoothest and most convincing fight choreography to be found in theatre. If nothing else this show gets the Best Fencing Match On Stage award for 2021.



But it deserves more, too. The stage, designed by Ingrid Hu, is clean and spartan, beautifully complimented by Marty Langthorne's lights. The fine movement and fight work falls to Yami Lofvenberg & Claire Llewellyn, respectively. But it is ultimately the hard work and careful reading of Saif and Wong which carry the day here. Two thumbs up!