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Swim Team brings Iranian women's lives to the surface – but could go deeper

Remount of SummerWorks hit about aspiring swimmers could have been expanded to include more details

BY GLENN SUMI NOVEMBER 13, 2019 5:23 PM





Photo by Samantha Polzin

SWIM TEAM by Jaber Ramezani (Nowadays Theatre/Alma Matters Productions). At the Theatre Centre (1115 Queen West). Runs to November 17. \$15-\$25. 416-538-0988. See [listing](#). Rating: NNN

A [promising work](#) at SummerWorks 2018, this remount of **Jaber Ramezani**'s drama about the limitations on women's freedom in post-revolution Iran still packs a punch, but it could go further.

Led by their coach, Roya (**Banafsheh Taherian**), three aspiring young female athletes – Lili (**Aylin Oyan Salahshoor**), Katy (**Mahsa Ershadifar**) and Nary (**Tina Bararian**) – practise swimming in a remote, arid section of Iran. The twist? There's no pool in the area. Instead, Roya has constructed a make-believe pool in a flat, in which the women can work on their strokes, breathing techniques and build their team spirit.

In a program note by director **Aida Keykhai** and assistant director **Sarah Marchand**, we're told that sports in Iran became subject to gender segregation after the 1979 revolution. Money and facilities were scarce, and the laws about women wearing hijabs meant they couldn't easily compete against each other. Hence, many women's sports teams disbanded.

So there's a disturbing allegorical undertow to this seemingly absurd situation.

But at 65 minutes, there's room to expand the script. The young athletes remain mere types – Lili is anxious and nervous, Katy is more



of a follower and Nary is a pink-haired rebel. Why do they want to swim? What are their home lives like?

Taherian's Roya remains the most intriguing character, a woman who had achieved some success before but has had her freedom curtailed. Her story recounting a dream involving Michael Phelps isn't fully developed, but the charismatic actor suggests lots with her expressive eyes and gritty, world-weary voice.

The production, too, creates a haunting effect, particularly **Nancy Boake's** shimmering lighting that, with a little imagination, makes us envision the pool these women ought to be swimming in.

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Glenn Sumi

Glenn started writing for NOW's theatre section in 1997. Currently, he edits and contributes to the film and stage sections. He sees approximately 280 live stage shows and 150 movies a year. His mother once described his job as "Seeing The Lion King"

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