

are the nostos of this party from hell. An assortment of sofas and armchairs evokes

derworld merely marked off by a length of tape.

It's an uphill struggle for

chair seclusion zone, while probably near-suffocating in a balaclava hood – is given

remarkable stage presence, injecting his part with almost palpable menace.

opening Toccata, to the pastoral lyricism of Arcadia and the braying cornets

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Touring to 17 March  
(www.operanorth.co.uk)



A more playful persona: Shazia Mirza

## Comedy

### SHAZIA MIRZA

Anvil

BASINGSTOKE ★★★

In 2001, the Muslim comic Shazia Mirza leapt to the attention of the media with her infamous post-September 11 joke: "My name is Shazia Mirza – at least that's what it says on my pilot's licence." She's been living it down ever since.

At the time, the amount of attention she had was in almost inverse proportion to the quality of her act, but

in the intervening years Mirza has gradually pulled away from her monotone, deadpan persona, where laughs were sparse, to a more playful incarnation. Tired of being taken as a spokesperson for the Asian community, Mirza has taken a more personal approach and her new material even includes some good old-fashioned filth: she admitted tonight that some of her smut was "a bit Frankie Howerd".

Casually attired (where once she wore a hijab), smiling (where once she scowled), Mirza pleased her audience with a number of

routines (most about her "repressed" upbringing), including one about her first visit to a gig, to see UB40, where she was bemused by the screaming fans until she saw how old the band were: "My scream was more of a horror movie scream – the average age of the band was deceased."

Mirza's timing remains tight and is enhanced by her variety of facial expressions. Sadly the interval arrives when she has built up a head of steam and both she and the audience are reluctant to take the break.

While the first half meanders through personal

memories, the second half falls into three main sections: how Mirza met the Queen and Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace, the death threats she had from extremist Muslims unhappy that her chosen profession was ridiculing her community, and finally a short film that scans like a character work-in-progress. The royal yarn is less than the sum of its parts but still includes nice lines such as explaining her presence at the function in the context of positive discrimination: "It's because I'm brown; all doors are now open to me and I'll never know my true potential."

The chilling humour the section where Mirza reads out her death threats is mined as much as possible for laughs but serves as a reminder of just why she once attracted so much press attention and one of the factors that may have forced her to work even harder on her act.

"The threats I can handle, the worst part is when they say my act is rubbish," says Mirza, now in a stronger position to rebuff her detractors.

**JULIAN HAI**

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Touring to 24 June  
(www.shaziamirza.org)