

Ahlam's *You Bury Me* follows a group of six young Egyptians as they navigate love and loss against the backdrop of a post-Arab Spring Cairo.

Set in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Ahlam's characters live in a world where talking about the wrong thing is ill-advised, writing about the wrong thing could get you arrested, and loving the wrong person can make you disappear altogether.

Cairo occupies the perfect amount of space in the show – despite the challenges facing them, Ahlam allows her characters to behave independently from the political landscape about which they clamber: acting as an integral part of the city's fabric, without being too tightly tied to it. They drink and kiss and laugh and cry like teens and twenties across the globe and, as Ellie Keel (founder of the Women's Prize for Playwriting of which Ahlam is a recipient) so rightly puts it, successfully "communicate the heightened emotions of young people everywhere" in doing so.

It does take a minute for the show to settle into itself – the choral delivery of lines is a difficult, ever-so-slightly self aware thing to get right straight off the bat, even for accomplished companies like the Bristol Old Vic's – but after a few minutes, *YBM* slows and matures. And once we're in, we're in. The cast do a terrific job, their performances confident and utterly absorbing. (Special shout outs to Hanna Khogali for her portrayal of romantically conflicted engineering grad Alia and Yasemin Özdemir's rebellious Maya, both of whom breathe a rare kind of life into their roles).

A word to the wise: it is possible to feel a little bit sceptical about a show like Ahmad's. There's awkward teen sex, and dating app references, and a 2010 pop soundtrack that risks leaving the more musically discerning audience member slightly nonplussed. My companion suggests that the political strands to the story could have stood a little taller. It's true that Ahlam doesn't hold a magnifying glass over history: the specifics of Cairo's troubles aren't really addressed. But the cast and creatives behind *YBM* have successfully cultivated a feeling of such societal unease that the facts and figures of the thing are left somewhat redundant. Because yes, it's a show about politics – but it's about people too. "This play can only capture a fragment of that world that I grew up in, and a sliver of the city that raised me," Ahlam writes on *YBM*: "but what I hope that this play does is honour my peers".

And that it certainly does. *You Bury Me* is a love story with multiple lovers. It's about lust and belonging; people and politics – the cities that break us – and the cities that make us. Leave cynicism at the door, and you'll be rewarded tenfold.

You Bury Me is playing at The Bristol Old Vic until 4 March; tickets available at bristololdvic.org.uk