

Doing it for themselves

With the abundance of buns and boobs on show in the city, Anna Whitehouse finds welcome respite in the oh-so-sultry 'Pillow Talk'. Photography by Will Lew

'Balls,' booms actress Conny Wilhelmuis, a 49-year-old bosomy housewife, reading from a poem by Anne McNaughton. 'Firm, soft, in hairy sacks,' she continues, coquettishly flicking her bouffant, floxed hair, while oozing 'come to bed' allure. Despite her brazen delivery, Wilhelmuis, one of 23 actresses rehearsing for 'Pillow Talk', a new erotic show at Het Fijnhout Theater, isn't used to speaking candidly about male anatomy.

Sex was a little taboo for women of my generation,' she explains, stepping down from the stage. 'Talking about scrotums "wrinkling like prunes" and being described as "beautiful pebbles from beneath" has definitely increased my confidence levels.'

The show, which ran for one day in April and returns this month with the tag line 'A little bit of "naughty", a whole lot of "nice"', is steering clear of the brash, carnal material often found in the neighbouring Red Light District. 'There's tits and arse all over the place in Amsterdam,' says Ann James, founder of production company Urban Aphrodite International, which is driving the performance. 'When you start looking for something more sophisticated, something erotic and something sensual for women, there's nothing – it's porn on one side and marriage on the other.'

While parallels will be drawn with the 'Vagina Monologues', the hit Broadway show that features stories about the female anatomy as a tool for women's empowerment, 'Pillow Talk', with its cast of Dutch women of all ages, shapes and sizes delivering (in English) some of the punchiest female erotica out there, is more about arousal. 'We're less about the vagina as a feminist tool and more about its sensuality and climax,' says James.

The show is made up selected erotic short stories and poems that start as early as Sappho's ancient Greek contributions from the island of Lesbos, follow through works by Anaïs Nin from her New York days in the '70s and end with a contemporary post-feminist performance of 'Right There' by relatively unknown American writer Eleanor Colvin.

In total, it's the work of 23 erotic writers, performed by 23 actresses over two hours. The stories will be



Ladies of the night: 'Pillow Talk' offers up a bit of naughty and nice

broken up with a puppetry striptease from Greg Rube, whose alter ego Miss Lulu La Rue will tell the story of the life of a burlesque queen in New Orleans. Plates of 'tried and tested' aphrodisiacs such as chocolate and passion fruit canapés will be handed round by a harem of bare-chested male models.

I wanted the pieces to cover the length and breadth of female sexuality,' says James, explaining that the performances will be in English for now, but she has plans to translate the texts into Dutch for future performances. 'I picked pieces that were sensual, revealing and, at times, heart breakingly sad – arousal doesn't always have to be obvious, in-your-face fucking.'

While the show allows the audience to indulge in a fantasy world where one girl lusts after 'the gentle probing finger' of another girl, it also has elements

that explore more painful aspects of sexuality. 'Breast pains', a poem by Wendy Ryden, graphically describes a woman having sex with a younger man, before revealing in the final stanza that she's had a mastectomy. 'It pulls you from arousal to tears to warmth in one minute,' adds Wilhelmuis.

Linda van der Steen, a young, auburn-haired, petite actress, delivers Nin's 'Little Berle', a skit about a woman with strong lesbian urges, wearing a pink basque, transparent trousers and kitten heels. 'The Red Light District is for men,' she says,

'whereas this is something for women – it's more indulgent, like having a hot, sexy, only warm bath.'

Equally, Claartje van Swaaij, who will be reading Sappho's 'Hymn to Aphrodite', considers herself '90 per cent straight' and believes 'sexuality isn't black and white,' feels it's time for women to be completely open about their sexual fantasies. 'This is not grotesque or soulless. It's about women opening up to women about what turns them on.'

The show isn't the reserve of an all-female audience, though. 'There's definitely not just one type of man who visits prostitutes,' says James. 'It's no different here – we're expecting all sorts: grandfathers, mothers, builders and a run or two.' She adds, 'There's nothing to be ashamed of – heck, we could even perform for the Pope.' Now that would take some balls.

'Pillow Talk' shows this month on 12 June at Het Fijnhout Theater, Loosdrecht 39 (618 4768/hetfijnhout.nl or urbanaphrodite.nl). 'Petite Pillow Talk', an entertainment cruise, can be booked for groups of 25 or more throughout June and July.

**WORD
PLAY**

Put pen to paper at Urban Aphrodite's erotic writing workshop on 11 June. urbanaphrodite.nl