

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## One Man Two Guvnors

Richard Bean

New Wolsey Theatre and Nuffield Theatre, Southampton

New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich

5–28 September 2019

Very rarely in my view does a much hyped production live up to its reputation or have the ability to keep you laughing from start to finish. The New Wolsey's version of surprise West End hit *One Man Two Guvnors* does both these things in spades. It's a clever, fast-paced farce that doesn't take itself too seriously and in doing so combines the best of the comedy genres to create an evening of hilarity worthy of past greats like Morecambe and Wise or Laurel and Hardy.

Based on Carlo Goldoni's 1746 Italian comedy *The Servant of Two Masters*, this [first hit the stage in 2011](#) starring James Corden and has gone on since to tour the globe and win many accolades.

Set in Brighton in 1963, the plot centres on failed musician Francis Henshall, not the brightest spark in the box but desperate to find a job as he's hungry and down to scraping round the bins for an odd chip.

Into his life comes not one but two possible employers, Rachel Crabbe posing as her dead twin brother Rosco (Josie Dunn) and her fiancé Stanley Stubbers, in hiding for killing the said brother.

Meanwhile across town, nice-but-dumb Pauline Clench (Elizabeth Rowe), who had been due to marry the rather criminally minded Rosco, is now holding her engagement party with a new beau Alan, would-be actor and all-round lovey, paid for by her smalltime criminal father Charlie (John Elkington). Amongst the guests are Alan's father and dodgy lawyer Harry Dangle (Matt Devitt), the Clench's bookkeeper, the rather forthright Dolly and Charlie's friend but also former employer of Rachel, Lloyd (Marcus Adolph).

Pauline's father Charlie had promised Rosco money to marry Pauline and Rachel turning up posing as Rosco, who is meant to be dead, causes much consternation among the guests, not least Charlie who feels he has to fulfil his original promise.

Rachel intends keeping up the pretence only as long as it will take her to extract money out of Charlie and then track down Stanley so that they can escape to Australia. Stanley meanwhile is keeping a low profile but is in turn desperate to find Rachel. Francis happens to be in the right place at the wrong time—or visa versa—and ends up working for both of them but getting increasingly muddled by his duties. Can he keep both parties happy long enough to get enough money together for a good nosh up and a week in Majorca with the delectable Dolly?

Meanwhile, will Alan try to kill his love rival and expose Rachel's secret too soon? Will Stanley ever get the right end of the stick? And who the heck is Paddy?

As in all good farces, there's lots of mistaken identity, confused messages and hopeless, lovelorn characters. There is also plenty of physical comedy including some brilliant pratfalls with Richard

Leeming as 84-year-old waiter Alfie bearing most of the brunt—and performing them superbly.

The set is complicated but adaptable. There are a lot of scene changes but these are cleverly overcome by having a visible skiffle band above the stage performing between each scene. The music by Grant Olding is excellent and the very talented cast double up as the musicians.

Philip Tomlin is amazing as Henshall, a lovely combination of knowing and clueless with a bit of wide-boy thrown in. George Maguire makes the most of would-be actor and ardent lover Alan, Luke Barton is spot on as posh boarding school twit Stanley and Tori Allen Martin commands the stage with her *Carry On*-esque version of Francis's love interest Dolly.

There are some brilliant set pieces, including a hilarious food scene in the pub, increasingly abusing a member of the audience (or was she a stooge?) and at one point Francis has a fight with himself.

This is such an entertaining evening. The whole cast and crew work as a team to create a fast-paced, laugh-a-minute, stunning production that combines the best of theatre in an evening that literally leaves you breathless.

A must-see—don't miss it!

**Reviewer:** [Suzanne Hawkes](#)