

British Theatre Guide

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Our Man In Havana

Adapted from the Graham Greene novel by Clive Francis

Creative Cow in association with Malvern Theatres and Buxton Opera House

Exeter Northcott Theatre

4–8 July 2017

The homegrown touring theatre company Creative Cow goes from strength to strength—and from pubs, bowling alleys and art gallery performances to mainstream venues and tours including the Republic of Ireland.

And so arrives *Our Man In Havana* adapted from the master's novel by Clive Francis and directed by founding member Amanda Knott.

Played for laughs, much of the iconic subtle Greene satire is lost, but mourn and park that and this is an amusing four-handed timewaster with more skill than thrill.

Charles Davies is believably naïve as the hapless expat Wormold attempting to sell vacuum cleaners in 1950s Cuba and sinking against the tide of expensive education and hobbies for his spoilt daughter. Recruited as a spy by London, he follows the well-worn tradition of claiming expenses for a string of imaginary agents (with names picked from the country club members' list) and excels in passing off exploded diagrams of vacuum cleaners as secret military installations.

And as exposure seems inevitable, his value is verified as his agents' namesakes are picked off and he is a marked man with poison on the agenda.

With plummy accent and flashing eyes, Isla Carter is gawky adolescent Milly (with a penchant for quite contrary Hail Marys and setting schoolmates on fire), breathy, sexy Beatrice (who, notes Wormold in a rare moment of clarity, has much in common with his daughter) and various strippers, salesmen and secretaries in quick change succession—all hammed up to the nth degree.

James Dinsmore switches between laconic, upper-crust spymaster Hawthorne and heavily Germanic person of interest Dr Hasselbacher by way of a convent, trade fair and sequinned drag queen Theresa while Michael Onslow grasps the gift of Milly's creepy suitor Captain Segura, the feared, leather-clad secret policeman whose hit list and human hide cigarette case is the stuff of legend; makes a regal Queen and pops up as a nun, waiter, Chief, shop assistant and anyone else needed.

All four narrate to backfill and move the action along from vignette to vignette, scene to scene but there is a lot of faffing about with props and furniture which tamps down any building tension and overall the piece loses its way, developing into tongue-in-cheek earnestness, slapstick and pastiche which just misses the mark becoming instead am-dram-esque spoof.

Nina Raines's set is evocative: terracotta, pink and faded yellow archways and tiles, and palm trees which, complemented by Derek Anderson's lighting and Simon Whitehorn's soundscape

reminiscent of night-time crickets, conjures the Caribbean while simple props cleverly become, with a little inventiveness and imagination, get-away cars and windows offering escape.

A breathless, well-staged romp which certainly entertains but is not quite sure what it is.

Reviewer: [Karen Bussell](#)