

British Theatre Guide

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The Lovers

Bridget O'Connor

Live Theatre, Newcastle

(2005)

Although she has written two short story collections, a number of radio plays and co-authored one stage play, *The Lovers* is Bridget O'Connor's first solo stage play, although you wouldn't think so, for it is a very assured piece of writing. A dark comedy with a cast of four, in the best traditions of the *genre* it keeps the audience smiling and chuckling throughout, with the occasional burst of full-scale laughter, and a totally unexpected twist at the end.

On a station platform Tyrone, a gigolo, is robbed of his briefcase by Marty, a young yob, who tries to sell it back to him. This opportunist theft and their subsequent meeting - which doesn't have a happy outcome for Marty - leads to a most unlikely business partnership, as the youngster joins the older man and his partner (in two senses) Helen in the gigolo business. Marty's fiancée Kelsey, plain and serious-minded, is drawn in as cleaner and general dogsbody. Then Kelsey becomes pregnant and the scene is set for some unexpected twists and turns, with the last one being particularly devastating.

Live's associate director for new writing Jeremy Herrin, assisted by a simple but effective set by Imogen Cloët and some very moody lighting from Malcolm Rippeth, keeps the piece moving seamlessly from scene to scene, setting a pace which never allows the comedy to flag whilst still allowing the more serious parts of O'Connor's script to make their impact.

As the aging gigolo Tyrone, Alexi Kaye Cambell is, at the outset, perfectly controlled and in control, which makes his later degeneration the more shocking, whilst Kris Deedigan's Marty has all the wicked charm of the good looking, happy-go-lucky bad boy. Tracey Gillman's Helen has a brittleness underlying the sophistication and self-confidence which are the qualities which first strike us. The complexities of the relationship between her and Tyrone are well portrayed by both actors.

It is hard to fault the performance of any of the three and they convince throughout, but it would be hard to better Emily Aston's little and (on the surface) self-sacrificing mouse, Kelsey. The surprising - indeed shocking - ending, of which she is the cause, knocks us back on our heels and yet, on reflection, should not have been unexpected at all, for it is all foreshadowed in her effectively understated performance.

Live has a knack of finding (indeed often commissioning) this kind of funny but essentially serious play which has a lot to say about human foibles. Well worth seeing!

"The Lovers" runs until 19th November, 2005.

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)