

British Theatre Guide

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Two

Jim Cartwright
Derby Theatre
Derby Theatre
2–24 March 2018

Nearly 25 years after the old Derby Playhouse presented Jim Cartwright's comic two-hander in its Studio, Derby Theatre has taken the towels off the beer pumps and blown the cobwebs off the optics to present *Two* as its major spring production.

Designer Ali Allen has certainly got into the right spirit by creating a working on-stage bar which is the first thing you notice on entering the auditorium. The first three rows of seats have been taken out, allowing members of the audience to sit at one of nine tables and become the customers of what turns into a really busy pub.

The attention to detail is thorough: as well as real beer, served beforehand and during the interval courtesy of Derby company Dancing Duck Brewery, there are shelves above the bar with a collection of plates and ornaments that you might find in any northern pub. And you can see through the bar to the toilets and steps leading to an upstairs flat.

The play is set in 1989 and songs from the era blast out of the bar's jukebox before the landlord and landlady make their initial appearance.

It must be an intoxicating feeling for the two actors to play half a dozen distinctive characters. There is no time to waste in making a different impression on the audience and sometimes even less time for a change of costume.

Sean McKenzie and Jo Mousley rise to the challenge and no doubt many people will be raising a glass to them before the end of the run.

Cartwright's script calls for the landlord and landlady to interact with imaginary characters in the pub. Having some of the audience on stage meant this produced unexpected results on the night I saw *Two*. Playing a Jack the Lad type who thinks of himself as a ladykiller, McKenzie told a woman at one of the tables "you are beautiful" only for the man with her to hand McKenzie his glasses!

There is nothing rum about the two actors as they show us a bickering couple who never address their problems. They mix well together both as diverse characters with contrasting needs and aspirations as well as the couple who own the pub.

Perhaps their least successful pairing is an eccentric Welsh woman who loves "big, strong men" and her husband whose effeminacy borders on being stereotypical.

Julia Thomas, who took over when Sarah Bringham was not able to direct because of health reasons, extracts as much humour as possible from the script, particularly when McKenzie and Mousley play a fat, cute couple who visit the pub to watch television.

But there is also a huge amount of emotion. The scene in which McKenzie plays a coarse, possessive man who threatens to hit his timid partner has the power to shock. And the ending in which the landlord and landlady reveal how their lives were turned upside down seven years previously, is upsetting, distressing and yet tender.

Usually, the male actor plays a boy who comes into the pub looking for his father; here one of the theatre's young company takes the role and heightens the play's defining moment.

Derby Theatre has had some strong in-house productions over the past couple of years. With *Two* it's raised the bar and proved that no one should be ready to call time on Cartwright's masterpiece. Audiences in Derby have had to endure nearly a quarter of a century without *Two*; this production shows it was well worth the wait.

Reviewer: [Steve Orme](#)