

British Theatre Guide

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Two Pints

Roddy Doyle

Abbey Theatre, Dublin

Live Theatre, Newcastle

12–23 September 2018

When I first began reviewing, I used to write notes during the play, but I soon gave that up, for two reasons: not only did it prove to be a little distracting for audience members around me but I also found that I couldn't read the the damned things afterwards!

Watching the Abbey Theatre's production of Roddy Doyle's *Two Pints*, however, I really wished I had paper and pen with me, for the play is filled with pithy nuggets of simple wisdom which make you think "I must remember that" but then another, and another, and another come along and the previous "must remembers" are forgotten. Just one remains in my mind—probably, in fact certainly, not the exact words—"You have to like your life."

The play is set in a Dublin pub over three nights. Two men in late middle age sit at the bar and talk. Writer Doyle doesn't give them names; he simply calls them One and Two, so I'll refer to them by the names of the actors, Liam Carney and Philip Judge.

On the first night, Carney joins Judge who has been sitting at the bar reading a paper and he makes it clear he is annoyed because of a problem in the hospital car park, because you have to pay to visit the sick anyway and because he feels the sloppy dressing of some of the other visitors is disrespectful. In the course of the conversation, we learn that he was visiting his father who is coming to the end of his life.

As the evening comes to an end and the two men head off home, we move into the first interval.

The second night is a while later and it is obvious that Carney's father is dying, could go at any time. And he does, as a text message from Carney's sister lets him know. The two men leave together and head towards the hospital, and we move into the second interval.

The third night is the night after the funeral and the talk is of death and funerals, of what sort of songs are appropriate on that kind of occasion and of the afterlife. Carney leaves to rejoin the family and the play comes to an end.

There! I've given away the plot! Massive spoiler!

It isn't a spoiler, though, because it hasn't got a plot. It has two old friends sitting in a bar, talking about things which are dear to their hearts. It has Judge supporting his friend through a difficult period. They even have the silent support of Raymond the barman, played by Ronan Carr, who never says a word but is there throughout, even during the interval when he actually serves members of the audience with their Guinness!

This is not happening on a stage. The Live Theatre stage has gone, completely. In one corner of what used to be stage is the bar of your men's Dublin local. And it's a working bar, serving members of the audience in the intervals and before the show starts.

No plot? No stage? Is it really a play then?

Of course it is. It's about one of the most important parts of life, the leaving of it, and the feelings and thoughts and idea aroused in the minds of those who lose their loved one and those who are their friends and supporters.

It's funny (hilarious at times), quirky, sad, shot through with wisdom and warmth. Sitting listening to these two men, observing their friendship, sharing in their feelings, we gain as much as we get from most plays and more than from many. We are sharing in their lives and that—surely—is what drama is about.

Roddy Doyle has created two engaging, human characters to whom we can respond because they are us. The play could equally well be set in Newcastle or Sunderland and, rather than the Liffey, the river could be the Tyne, Wear or anywhere else. Whilst the language is the Irish of Dublin with its soft lilt, the situation and the people and the voices and the feelings are universal.

Playing in such intimate proximity to the audience and in such a non-theatrical setting, Carney and Judge, under the sensitive direction of Caitriona McLaughlin, bring their characters to very real and sympathetic life.

This is the play's British première and, after it closes at Live on 23 September, it will move to The Peacock in Sunderland from 25 to 28.

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)