

# British Theatre Guide

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## Visitors

Barney Norris

Up in Arms

Bush Theatre

26 November 2014–10 January 2015

This beautiful, moving and often poetic play, premièred at Cheltenham Everyman earlier this year and then [seen at the Arcola](#), is perfectly matched to the Bush.

It is about love and about Alzheimer's, but especially about love, and although in some ways that makes it a painful play it is at the same time full of a joyful humanity and humour and Alice Hamilton's direction balances those elements beautifully.

Arthur and Edie are past pension age but still running their farm in Wiltshire, though now Arthur has not only got the farming to handle single-handed but he's looking after Edie too. As they sit comfortably in their twinned wing armchairs she remembers a day long ago at the seaside with a bride all in white on the beach and "just a boy" as a bridegroom. That makes Arthur reminisce about their own wedding.

Robin Soans as Arthur and Linda Bassett as Edie subtly capture a sense of years of close companionship and familiarity with its bonding and faint frictions that their love has brought them. There is a total honesty about these performances that is enormously touching without a breath of sentimentality.

This is a play full of memories and of memories lost. Edie may have total recall of some moments but there are times when she is stuck to think of what something is called or remember what happened yesterday. This is a woman slowly sinking into dementia. Physically too she is beginning to find some things difficult. But she has not lost her sense of humour. "Forget it," says Arthur of something unimportant. "I probably will," she promptly replies.

Arthur is coping but he's not as steady on his pins as he was and, with no hope of the council providing home care in the foreseeable future, their son Steve has arranged for a young woman to move in as a carer in return for free board and lodging.

Steve (Simon Muller), a stressed insurance man whose marriage is collapsing, doesn't have the best relations with his parents. He can't even manage to temper his language and his jokes to match their sensibilities. Carer Kate (Eleanor Wyld), on the other hand fits in perfectly, once Arthur has got over her hank of blue hair. This makes an interesting contrast between two people both a bit lost in their lives but who handle it differently.

Barney Norris has been an assistant to Peter Gill and recently published *To Bodies Gone*, a book about Gill's work, and in this play shows some of the same understanding of ordinary lives and their extraordinariness, of profound statements from ordinary people that you feel must have been heard not invented like Edie's comment "People are like glass. You see through them, you never get to them."

With this quality of writing and Linda Bassett and Robin Soan's performances you don't just think I know people just like them, you feel you know Edie and Arthur themselves. This is Norris's first full-length play and it is a remarkable debut beautifully served by these actors.

**Reviewer:** [Howard Loxton](#)