



[Out of Order](#) by Ray Cooney

Performed at Opera House

Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) and Charles Britten May 2017

They say a week is a long time in politics, but in Ray Cooney's brilliant farce **Out of Order**, a few seconds is all it takes to transform a situation - almost invariably for the worse.

For those familiar with the traditions of Whitehall farce, **Out of Order** is might seem almost a users' manual of standard devices, from the dignified man losing his trousers (wearing sock suspenders of course), unexpected guests presenting a potential crisis to an almost non-stop opening of doors as the situation gets ever more complicated but this doesn't matter when we are carried along with action, right from the very beginning. This is one which does not have a slow build-up, grabbing us from the start.

This breathless play takes the nefarious situation of a Tory minister, the magnificently named Richard Willey, having an affair with the secretary to the Labour leader, and adds twist upon twist. The unexpected intrusion of a dead body creates chaos and threatens to blow their secret. Each subsequent attempt to resolve the problem only creates more trouble, with an ever-growing number of people dragged into the fast-developing maelstrom. With plot twists around every corner - or, more usually, through the highly unreliable window - the pace never drops, yet the towering achievement of this play is that it is never hard to follow. Quite simply, whatever the worst thing is that can happen, it does, with spectacular and potentially life-changing results, not least for the hotel waiter's financial situation.

The individual performances were excellent, with **Shaun Williamson** as the hapless secretary **George Pigden**

and

**Arthur Bostrom**

as the hotel manager truly standing out.

**Susi Amy**

has to be one of the sexiest secretaries ever to work in Westminster and

**James Holmes**

is superb as surely the canniest waiter in London. Even so, the biggest star is the window which drives the plot unpredictably throughout the show. Originally written in 1990 and performed around the world - showing just how universal a genre public ridicule of politicians is - the play contains as much nudity as this year's Eurovision Song Contest and every joke one can imagine a farce having. But none of that is a negative. Indeed, the transferable nature of the production means it has been updated for the present day, with a minister answerable to Theresa May, the secretary working for Jeremy Corbyn and a reference to the upcoming election. Years from now, we can expect the show to still be going strong, even though some of the names in the background will have changed. All this goes to show that, whatever a week may bring, in politics and comedy alike, some things never change.

Given the perennial popularity of farces, it is a shame that relatively so few are produced as big touring productions and given the audience reaction of **Out of Order**, theatre producers might take note that this is a genre that has never gone out of fashion and continues to delight

audiences and fill theatres. With so many musical spin-offs, tribute bands and 'safe' popular shows around, the theatre is crying out for more plays like '

### **Out of Order'**

. If you want relief from election overkill, Brexit and terrorism, this is the kind of show that take you there; a great, colourful fun two hours entertainment.

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**'Out of Order' is on at Manchester Opera House until 3rd of June and continues touring until 22nd July. For details of future dates, please check the website [www.cooneyonstage.com/](http://www.cooneyonstage.com/)**