



[Days of Wine and Roses](#)

by Elysium Theatre Company at [53two](#) , Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougal](#) October 2017

Manchester really is a treasure trove of theatres, with new venues popping up seemingly

endlessly. One would think that both living in the city and being a part of the profession known as thespian, I would have seen and visited them all... but no! Last night saw me enter a completely new-to-me space which was intimate and surprisingly accommodating. I have visited the main theatre at **53two** many times before, but this was my first visit to their 'Studio' which is housed in the building next door. I loved the space.

The second pleasant surprise came from the production itself. I had absolutely no idea what to expect since I had to my eternal embarrassment, never seen the famous film from which it is based; however, as all good reviewers should, I have since done my research and even watched some of the film. The most surprising thing was just how completely different the two were and yet also how wonderfully similar too. I loved the writing of this play, by **Owen McCafferty** ; very concise, neat and excellently balanced packing the punches yet still managing to preserve its dignity. I now also like the lovely idea of transposing the action to Belfast and London, and adding the extra twist of the sectarian troubles in Ireland.

The play is written as a two-hander, and this not only filters out a lot of distractions it also makes the hard-hitting and dark themes of the play seem much more urgent and intense. You are completely drawn in to their world and although somehow you know there isn't going to be a happy ending, you are still rooting for them nevertheless. This is down to the excellently chosen cast of **Danny Solomon**, an extremely watchable and energetic actor who plays Donal, and **Alice Frankham**

, again very easy to watch with a whole wardrobe full of lovely facial expressions as Mona - all enhanced by the very tight and effective directing of

Jake Murray

. There is excellent chemistry between Solomon and Frankham right from the start, and in this well-paced piece, Murray takes us on this very intimate journey with skill. Starting in romantic comedy mode, the downward spiral to tragedy and despair is really quite compelling.

The play runs for 90 minutes non-stop, and is something of a tour-de-force for both performers as they descend the spiral from happy-go-lucky young adults with all the world ahead of them to full-blown alcoholics and all the problems that that brings. Donal being able to see the error of his ways does fail in his first attempt, though resolve and intelligent determination bring him back in the end. It is Mona, a Teetotaller before meeting Donal who simply cannot recognise what she has become, and despite Donal's love for her, and despite her now trying her best - she has been without a drink for 3 days - still goes back to her crummy bed-sit on the other side of town knowing that Donal is taking their young son back to Belfast with him.

The set, designed by **Yale Lambrecht**, worked well once we were in their London flat; however the first two scenes needed to be presented slightly differently (perhaps just in a single pool of light with the rest of the stage in blackout), since the presence of the set diffused the time and place of the action. I also feel that the fight scenes would have benefited from the help of a fight director; sadly the slaps were comical rather than real, and I simply didn't believe the build-up to the first few kicks from Donal.

However, those two observations aside, this was a thoroughly compelling piece of drama presented with professionalism and sincerity by a newcomer to the Manchester scene, Durham-based **Elysium Theatre Company**.