



[Rattle of a Simple Man](#)

at Lyceum Theatre, Oldham

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) February 2018

Written by Charles Dyer in the first years of the 1960s, when Britain was politically and socially coming out of its shell, and finding a voice after a decade or so of poverty and rationing after the war. He capitalised on both the repressed and tight-mannered morals of the day, and the move towards a more tolerant and free 'Swinging Sixties' society, juxtaposing these nicely in the form of a 40-something Northern virgin and a confident and experienced London prostitute.

At least on the surface, that is how our two protagonists showed themselves to be. However, this play is less comedic than pathetic, in the true and original meaning of the word. In a gentle comedy of situation and manners these two reveal more to each other than they have ever spoken to anyone else about, and they are strangers. Yet somehow they recognise in each other something very much in common, and it takes them both until half way through act 2 to vocalise this. They are both desperately lonely and need each other more than words can express.

To start from the beginning, Percy, a Manchester mill worker takes a trip down to London with a few of his male pals to watch a football match. They know he is sexually awkward and so make a bet of £50 that he cannot spend the night with a girl whilst down there. In a club after the match he is approached by a young, beautiful and seemingly sophisticated lady who invites him back. She is a prostitute.

Despite much of the comedy and situation being very dated, it still holds a certain appeal, but this is credit to the two protagonists for making this inconsequential outdated froth so appealing and creditable. **Kevin Whalen** plays Percy with such authenticity and sincerity that his plight becomes real, whilst we feel genuine sympathy for

Mayor

Rachael

's

sensitive portrayal of Cyrenne with every slip of the mask and every new reveal about her shameful upbringing.

The play is essentially a duologue, and the interruption of this by Cyrenne's brother brakes the mood completely, and his presence is little more than a plot device. Looking like an extra from The Godfather films, **Martin Taylor** played this role with menace, adding a rather threatening dimension to Cyrenne's family history.

The play is directed by **Pauline Walsh**, and her work on characterisation, character development and status was superb, though I did feel though that some of the movements were a little contrived at times. Acted on a set, designed by Pauline Walsh and

Roger Stretton

, the space seemed too large for this play - something I thought I would never say with the Lyceum's tiny stage! A very good effort was made to try and bedeck the set with period furniture and fittings.

It is the performances of both Whalen and Mayor though that make this play, and sitting in the small auditorium it was impossible to believe that I was watching a production performed by actors who are doing this as a hobby and not being paid for their obvious talents.