



Two by Jim Cartwright

Performed at [Royal Exchange](#) , directed by Greg Hersov, designed by Amanda Stoodley

Reviewed by [Emma Short](#) January 2012

With an emphasis on the tentative balance of self and other within a relationship, Jim Cartwright's **Two** takes us on a journey through the most intimate insights and fluctuations within couple dynamics. The secrets shared at the bar over a pint are captured in all their innocence, arrogance and transparency evoking a sublime pathos that grips the breath.

Justin Moorhouse and Victoria Elliott play all 14 of Cartwright's characters with tremendous versatility, flair and imagination. The range is astounding, from small boy, to bullying boyfriend, chipper landlord and wistful old man to mirror the portrayal of the scorned other woman, ground down elderly carer, brow beaten girlfriend to over excitable Maudie.

Greg Hersov's direction flows like golden ale from the pump; he orchestrates the changes of wardrobe and character with seamless subtlety. This manipulation of change is of course aided by the Royal Exchange's stupendous seven sided theatre module in the Great Hall which is an ideal performance space for **Two**. With its many exits and entrances branching from the central round bar it complements the show's Brechtian nature executed with sheer precision whilst maintaining the pub's naturalistic setting in the imagination of the audience with frequent interaction between actor and audience.

The focus gravitates naturally to the centre of the bar where the primary narrative played out between our Landlady and Landlord, with all other characters telling their merry tales around and against its wooden sculpted sides.

In many ways this could have been identified as a low cost production, considering the seeming simplicity of the set and props, and the fact only two actors played the parts of all 14 characters who each use mime in a performance sense. However, one should not be fooled by its modest appearance. The specially woven carpet interspersed with shiny black plastic **spill shaped puddles** evokes an authentic soiled pub feeling, this does not look cheap and when combined with the lighting effects during some of the monologues it is barely distinguishable as a designed floor, it really

pulls the imagination together.



Complimenting the magic carpet we have the subtle symbols and engravings embodying the central themes of love & partnership adorning the sides of the bar by Amanda Stooley, cupid, Elvis & Marilyn are all central components of stories shared. Suspended above the bar is a magnificent 400 strong glass chandelier made from carefully punctured tumbler, pint and shot glasses which is creatively lit by Chris Davey. The lighting too plays a most fundamental role in pulling the viewers into the psyche of the characters. Where a close up zoom or pan would be used in a movie context the lighting draws us in and pushes us away as the dialogue requires.

The essence of each character is exquisitely emphasised by both Justin and Victoria's phenomenal performances, and Greg's direction by means of humorous delicacy as with Fred and Alice, Moth and Maudie; heart warming tenderness as when the old man and old woman talk of their lives, loved ones and dearly departed; and in other cases with daring panache as when Mrs Iger climbs astride the bar to confess her love of 'big men' and Mr Iger's feeble deflation which gradually turns into volcanic fury, soon after returning to the cuckolded and introverted man he is in the shadow of his domineering wife.

The proprietors of the establishment miss nothing. Every raised glass, tipped hat, roaming eye and resigned sigh is recognised & acknowledged with quick witted northern charm and plentiful refills. There can be no rest for the wicked in this little pub. Busy is the name of the game and distraction is its purpose, for there is more to each relationship than meets the eye.

Over a whirlwind evening of comings and goings, monologues and dialogues the audience finds themselves sucked into the world of the pub, the hub of social dynamism, optimism, nihilism and drunken secrets. There is nothing stronger in a pub than the human spirit and each spirit represented in this play delivers a kick. In short the cast and crew deliver a performance true to Cartwright's script and vision with superb effect – highly recommended and playing until 25th Feb at the Royal Exchange.