



BRIT HIT ON BROADWAY: (left to right) Suzie Toase, Claire Lams, Daniel Rigby, James Corden, Oliver Chris, Jemima Rooper, Fred Ridgeway, Martyn Ellis, Trevor Laird in *One Man, Two Guvnors*.

Photo: Joan Marcus



Theater Review

One Man, Two Guvnors: Lots of laughs abound in import of bloody good Brit show

ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS

By Richard Bean

Based on Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*

Songs by Grant Olding

Directed by Nicholas Hytner

Presented by the National Theatre of Great Britain

Music Box Theatre

239 West 45th Street

(239-239-6200), <http://onemantwoguvnorsbroadway.com/>

By David NouNou

Madness, mayhem, merriment, and more are all wrapped up in one of the most madcap comedies to hit Broadway in many years.

What *The Book of Mormon* is to musical comedy, *One Man, Two Guvnors* is to farcical comedy. It is simple and convoluted in narrative, but of the highest caliber in writing, style, direction, and acting. It is a proverbial rollercoaster of zany craziness, and at the helm is a powerhouse named James Corden. He is a one-man dynamo, with enough energy to light up all the lights of Broadway. This is the only British import this season that deserves a run on Broadway, and hopefully for a long time.

Granted, some of the slapstick comedy is lowbrow, but it is actually funny. What is more, the dialogue is often intelligent and jabs the satirical needle into countless topics.

Some of the humor is intrinsically British, from jokes about English food to xenophobic jabs at other European countries (Spain, etc.) to sending up English-speaking Commonwealth nations (lots of bashing of Australia, which may sound a bit cruel to American audiences, but there is also a witty dig or two at Canada, and surprisingly no jokes about the USA).

Based on Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, an Italian play that was written in 1746 and updated to 1963 by Richard Bean, Mr. Bean has tweaked the storyline, set it in Brighton, England, and uses every form of comedy devised by man.

Its roots are in the *Commedia dell'Arte* (Comedy of the Guild), with touches of Moliere transferred to British pantomime, music-hall variety, and songs interspersed during set changes, resulting in total escapist entertainment in the highest form of comedy.

Suffice it to say, the plot involves star-crossed lovers and a servant. Due to his gluttony, the servant works for two masters who happen to be the doomed lovers, and neither one knows he works for the other. This way the servant can earn two salaries and eat twice as much, or so he thinks. Honestly, that is all one needs to know so one can enjoy every surprise as it pops up and not have any preconceived spoiler alerts. Expertly directed by Mr. Hytner, with physical direction by Cal McCrystal, they have assembled a first-rate group of actors to deliver all the comic flair that a piece like this needs. First to be mentioned is James Corden, who plays the heavysset servant Francis Henshall. The man possesses a cherubic angelic face, and is really a master of havoc and mayhem. He is dynamic, charming, and the joy he exudes is so infectious, I cannot imagine how anybody could resist not giving him the Tony Award for Best Actor.

The ill-fated lovers are Oliver Chris and Jemima Rooper, who portray the two "guvnors" (British slang for employers) who employ Mr. Corden. He is a dolt and she is dressed in men's clothing (you will find out why when you see the show), and they are a delight from start to finish. The supporting cast is flawless as well, with Suzie Toase playing Dolly, who ends up being Henshall's love interest. Ms. Toase is both hysterical and spot on when she eerily predicts that, in the 1980s, a woman will become prime minister. Finally, Tom Edden, as Alfie, the octogenarian waiter, is a hoot, with his manic energy and natural gift for slapstick.

This is the proverbial English music-hall comedy at its sublime best. A show you will remember for its unadulterated lowbrow comedy as well as the comedic timing of the performances played to perfection. Special mention must be made to Mark Thompson for the terrific sets and apropos costumes to capture the 1960s flavor. This is the Broadway blockbuster we have been waiting for to relieve the doldrums and be one of the highlights of 2012. In addition, one does not have to be British or an Anglophile to enjoy *One Man, Two Guvnors* to its fullest.

Edited by Scott Harrah

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