



[You Can't Take It With You](#)

by George S Kaufman and Moss Hart, performed at [Royal Exchange Theatre](#) , with *Told by an Idiot*

, directed by Paul Hunter, and designed by Laura Hopkins

Reviewed by [Helen Nugent](#) December 2011

You know you're in for something a little bit different when the only character on stage at the beginning of a play is a tortoise. In a spotlight. A tortoise in a spotlight. Yes this, as Mancunians would have it, was going to be proper different.

The omens were good from the start. The largest theatre in the round in Britain housed in what was once the largest room for commerce in the world; the Royal Exchange's Christmas show, rarely, if ever, a let-down; and a collaboration with Told by an Idiot, a company renowned for fusing comedy with tragedy, theatricality with nuance.

And the choice of show? A production written by the celebrated comedy writing double act, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart who, when they created *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*, engendered a Broadway hit, a Pulitzer Prize-winning play and an Oscar-laden film. And, more than 70 years after its first season, it was still drawing the crowds on a windswept winter evening in Manchester.

But enough of the hyperbole. Screwball comedies are notoriously tough to get right on stage, even without the space limitations of the intimate Exchange auditorium. And a play that literally whirls around a serious philosophical point risks losing its anchor. Meticulously-timed mayhem is central to the show's success and yet the performers must never lose sight of the overarching message that taking time to be happy is life's goal.

The large cast make it all look so easy. Furniture on wheels transforms the stage into a virtual carousel as the actors circle each other, barely pausing for breath as they spin themselves, sofas, chairs and tables around the room. Character traits take on immense appeal, from the wife who longs to be a ballet dancer and so never stops practising clumsily to the mother who takes up playwriting after a typewriter is delivered to the wrong address. A father makes fireworks in the attic while a son bangs out Beethoven on his xylophone.

