

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll

by Ray Lawler

The Doll is slightly plot-driven – there is exposition and some suspense arising from the arrival of characters and the outcome of events, however it is mainly character-driven. Believability of the characters and the ability of them to take the audience with them emotionally are key elements of the dramatic effect.

There are two **key moments** of the play (sorry to spoil the plot for you) - the fight between Barney and Roo, and Olive's rejection of Roo's proposal. These don't work properly if the audience isn't brought along with the characters emotionally, and I have seen it fail as a result. I have also seen the magic brought alive on a couple of occasions by characters you get to know and love.

The Setting

Melbourne: December 1953 and into January 1954, including the third scene set on New Year's Eve.

Character Information

[Source: The script itself]

Bubba Ryan (22) A shy-looking girl of about twenty-two ... a touch of wistful authoritiveness.

Pearl Cunningham is a biggish woman well corseted with dyed hair. She is a widow driven back to earning a living by the one job she knows well, that of a barmaid, though she would infinitely prefer something more classy – head salesman in a frock salon, for instance

Olive Leech (39) Despite a surface cynicism, there is something curiously unfinished about Olive, an eagerness that belongs properly to extreme youth.... She is a barmaid at the same city hotel as Pearl, but unlike the latter, she enjoys the job

Emma Leech (Approaching 70) She is a wizened life-battered wisp of a woman nearly seventy, with no illusions about humanity, expecting the worst of it, and generally crowing with delight when her expectations are fulfilled

Barney Ibbot (40) owes much of his success in love to this natural technique: he has an overwhelming weakness for women and makes them recognise it. Previous mention of him as a little man is not quite correct. He is short, certainly, but not much below medium height and solidly built. Probably his constant association with the bigger Roo emphasises his lack of inches. His manner is assertive, confident and impudently bright, perhaps a little overdone as a defiance to his forty years and the beginning of a pot belly. He has a returned soldiers' badge in his lapel.

Roo Webber (41) He is a man's man with a streak of gentleness, a mixture that invites confidence. Tall, forty-one years of age, hair tinged with grey, a rather battered face with a well-cut mouth. Recent experiences have etched a faint line of bewilderment between his eyes, but his manner seems free and easy-going.

Johnnie Dowd (25) a big, boyish friendly-looking fellow of twenty-five, obviously riding the crests of such waves as pride of body and unbroken spirit. Speaks quietly.