

KEYESIDE



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The glory of 'The Royal'

"Movies will make you famous; Television will make you rich; But theatre will make you good."

- Terence Mann

THE adrenaline that flows through the system after several nights on the stage represents an infusion of false energy: after a few spins on the theatrical merry-go-round, one becomes accustomed with the fatigue one eventually feels once a run concludes.

In some cases, that tiredness may take a few days for it to kick in beyond the final curtain, but that's neither a lament or a whinge: nervous energy only gets one so far, but one anticipates the fall-out as part of the theatrical process.

But you wouldn't swap it for anything. It's the same for seasoned long-distance runners or endurance athletes - the gain is worth whatever pain accompanies it.

On a personal basis, I ticked two big boxes last week: Firstly, I took part in my first theatrical run at the Theatre Royal, over six nights (including the dress rehearsal) as part of Waterford Musical Society's 'Man of La Mancha'.

Secondly, I proudly took my place in a cast which included our city and county's greatest living actor, Des Manahan, a joy onstage and a raconteur off it.

The man is just stunningly good company and a testament to living life to the fullest. Des's thespian talent remains as honed as ever and to get the opportunity to play off him during his wonderful 'Barber's Song' cameo was a genuine thrill.

And to learn that he called to my Grandparents' home in Curraghmore all of 60 years ago on his motorbike, back in his insurance-selling days, was a lovely revelation: talk about seven degrees of separation!

Anyone involved in shows or plays tends to have their own pre-production routine. Mine last week was all about

soaking up being on, around and behind the Theatre Royal stage, and not letting the week pass without really enjoying it. I thoroughly experienced the week.

The Theatre is among one of many gifts we in Waterford owe to the vision of John Roberts, dating back to 1783, and within three years of its opening, it was re-modelled into the three level 'drum' auditorium we know and love today.

To the rearmost of the stage stands arguably the theatre's most remarkable feature: the astounding and superbly restored 18th Century back wall, which doubled up as a part of Ben Hennessy's marvellous 'La Mancha' set last week.

Complete with an imposing arch, which towers in scale over the 15-foot wide proscenium arch flanking the stage, there were times last week when I happily gazed upward and planted a hand on the 200-plus-year-old masonry. Touching history. Our history.

And when one potters through the history of who has played and sung here, it's impossible not to feel a deep sense of pride that you're treading upon ground that's no stranger to some incredible names: Oscar Wilde, Percy French, John McCormack, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Hitlon Edwards, Micheál MacLiammóir, Harold Pinter, Cyril Cusack, CT Wilkinson, Anna Manahan, Des Manahan, Denny Corcoran, Bryan Flynn. The list wonderfully goes on.

I did my utmost not to lose sight of the significance of where I performed last week, and just how significant a playhouse it is, in the heart of an area which now champions and showcases this city's great and varied history.

There are few places like the Royal anywhere. Yes, there are issues with some of the sight-lines within the auditorium, but for me that only adds to its distinctiveness: and those



Keith Flanagan and Tobie Hickey in full flow during Waterford Musical Society's production of 'Man of La Mancha' at the Theatre Royal. See Encore 8 and 9 for Liam Murphy's review. | PHOTO: NOEL BROWNE

issues only add to the urgency of booking early there, be it for the big name attraction, the annual pantomime or the welcomingly revived yearly musical.

As I walked from stage left, beneath rows of gelled stage lights and fastened black drapes in front of that stunning back wall so redolent of a castle rampart, I tried to inhale some of this beautiful theatre's history and make it my own.

In any company-type stage production, solitary moments on the boards, be it during rehearsal and show week, are few and far between.

But I did manage to steal a few of them last week at the Royal, and it's something I've done at Croke Park and Semple Stadium more than once, long after the players and spectators have made for home.

To stand still, thinking only of that moment, the here and now, to take in the majesty of one's surrounds, is a technique work practising. Mountaineers

do it at summits: they're conscious of what it took to get them to that point and that's why we should all make the most of the view when we reach our own personal peaks.

Those moments are the great life-enrichers: that's why we should strive to make the most of them. To live, with your heart striving upward, as we put it in the penultimate line of 'Man of La Mancha'.

"This is your theatre and yours alone. Committees and Corporations can keep a building open, but it is only people who can keep a theatre alive by their presence, support and encouragement. The future is in your hands."

The words of the late Larry Fanning, who did more than anyone to ensure the Theatre Royal remained intact, as well as paving the way to restoring it as a vibrant, attractive playhouse, are the most appropriate means of concluding this week's contribution. Long may 'The Royal' gloriously reign.