



LIAM MURPHY REPORTS

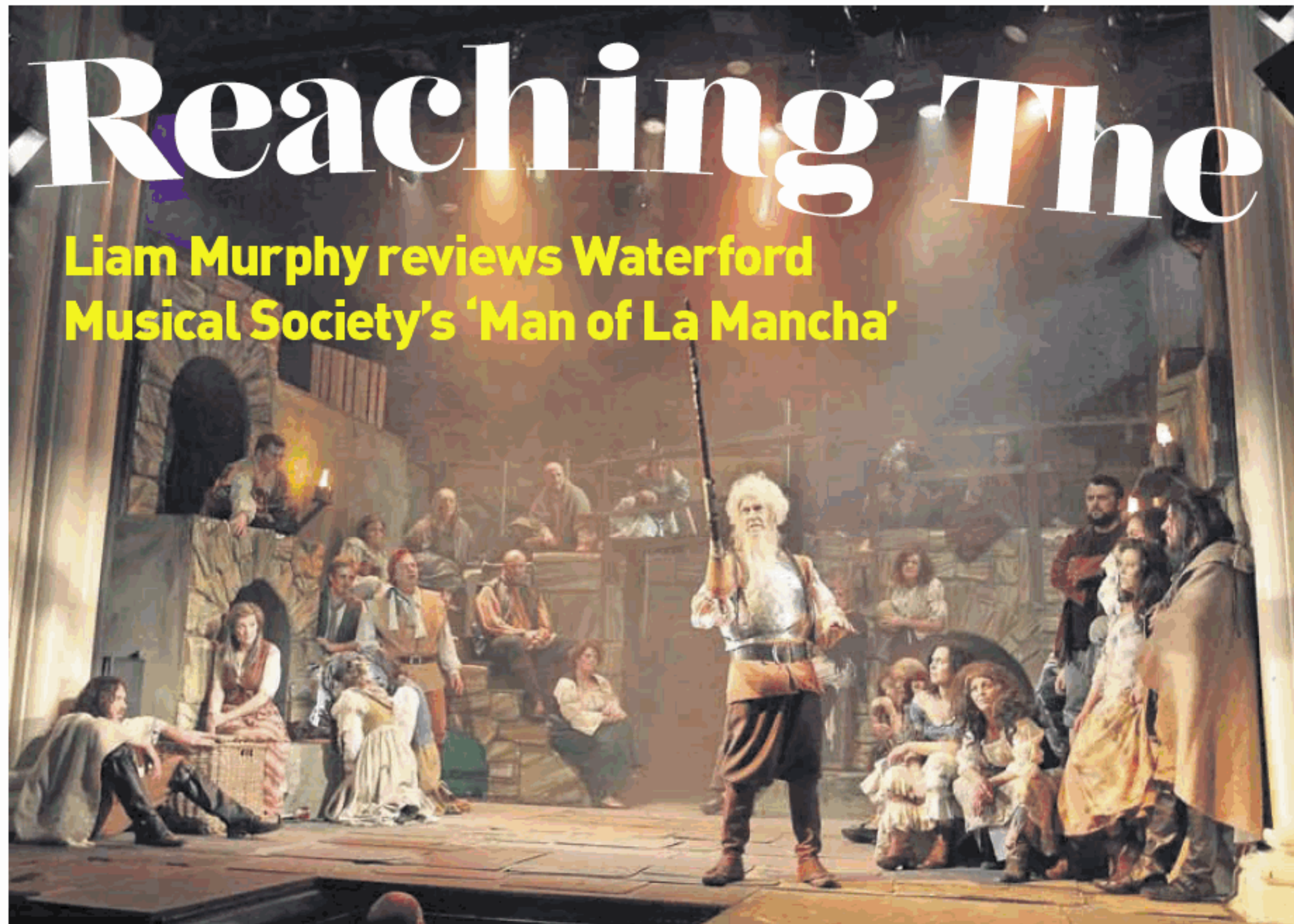
STANDING ovations were the order of the week for the Waterford Musical Society production of 'Man Of La Mancha'.

This is a complicated piece of musical theatre and Bill Stafford directed with a nostalgia for those memorable nights of the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera back in 1984 when Players Anonymous London surprised festival followers by winning the International Trophy.

This musical is set in a Spanish prison by the most famous of 17th Century authors, Miguel de Cervantes, who was a writer, actor, tax collector and playwright.

As the drama opens Cervantes is imprisoned by the Inquisition (Church and State torturers and executioners) and to survive he 'acts out' the text of a manuscript among his belongings. This becomes a powerful theatrical device of illusion and delusion and it is soon evident that the character he assumes Alonso Quijana who imagines he is a Knight-Errant, Don Quixote De La Mancha, an eccentric who is as mad as a belfry of crazy people. This becomes a play within a play - within a play!

Quixote sees enemies as being sent by an 'Enchanter' and as windmills as



Dan Quixote (Keith Flanagan) enchants the audience both on the stage and in the Theatre Royal auditorium during last week's run of 'Man of La Mancha' by Waterford Musical Society | PHOTOS: NOEL BROWNE

fearsome creatures and a serving girl of easy virtue, Aldonza, is idealised into a beautiful maiden, Dulcinea. The prisoners and audience are taken into this imaginary world.

Keith Flanagan plays these three characters in one and convinces the audience to have pity on his madness and eccentricity. There was emotional tenderness for his

final moments and he evoked sympathy with his big 'Quest' number 'The Impossible Dream'.

Tobie Hickey got every comic moment from his portrayal of the squire, Sancho Panza and made richly human his dedication to his master. This was a wonderful performance of broad earthy humour and fraternal tenderness.

His songs 'The Missive', 'I Really Love Him' and 'A Little Gossip' were a delight.

Jennifer White as Aldonza/Dulcinea caught well the hardened and coarse victim of poverty and casual abuse and was luminous in the closing emotional moments.

Des Manahan

gave a wonderful cameo and 'Barber's Song' as he introduced the shaving bowl that becomes the 'Golden Helmet of Mambrino' in a strong choral moment.

A fine orchestra under Wayne Brown's musical direction was always pleasing and Robert O'Connor shone as an onstage guitarist.

I loved the trio who became a powerful quartet for 'Only Thinking Of Him' and here, Dermot Keyes, Leon Sheehan, Avril Hartrey and Trish Orpen added vocal beauty to a show which was at times deadened by Brechtian technique and heavy-handed direction.



Keith Flanagan played three characters in one, convincing the audience to have pity on his eccentricity.



Tobie Hickey delivered a comedic tour de force as Sancho Panza.



Jennifer White was a luminous on-stage presence at the Theatre Royal last week.