

The Christmas Concert 2017

My friend stared at me with excited eyes.

“Are you going?” she asked.

I shook my head.

“Wish I could. I’d been saving some leave, just in case, but when it got to May and we’d not heard, I used it for the first night of the panto instead. Besides I need to watch the pennies.”

That was in August. My friends and I were sat at our favourite table in the Pheasantry. Lee had just announced, against everyone’s expectations, that he would indeed be hosting a Christmas concert, and the jazz club was buzzing with happy fans making plans.

“You could stay with me. Save the price of a hotel.” Both my friends offered

I felt rather choked up. I have such lovely mates.

“Thanks but no. I’d better not. I bet it’ll be fantastic though. You’ll love it.”

And that’s it. My Christmas concert report.

Ah – I’m not fooling anyone am I?

That really ought to have been it, but sometimes life does the serendipity thing.

First bit of serendipity came as a very generous reward and recognition bonus for some work I had done for another team. The second: I remembered that I hadn’t used all of the extra annual leave I’d been given for my long service award.

So when another friend asked if I’d like her to book a ticket for me, I caved completely. Thanks to her, I found myself with a second row seat along with other Stage Loppies. And thanks to The Queen of Finding Hotel Deals, I had a very reasonably priced room in the Covent Garden Travel Lodge. Christmas was going to start very merrily indeed.

Things didn’t get off to a perfect start. My travelling companions and I had been pretty lucky with the trains this year. Thanks to good luck and nice fellow passengers willing to swap, we’d managed to sit close together every journey. On this occasion, luck ran out. Due to – oh I’ll not bore you with the long story - the Northern ladies ending up scattered over the carriage.

Still, at least we got there. One of the gang couldn’t make it so the Northern Ladies were one down.

And the Stage Loppies were one down too as one of us had double booked.

Anyway, our train arrived in London on time, we met the last of the Northern Ladies at KX and, courtesy of their senses of direction and the Piccadilly Line, we were soon in our rooms at the Travel Lodge.

The Northern Ladies had a table booked at Brown's and, blatantly nicking their idea, I arranged another for the SLs. Because we had a big group we were due to start our meal at 4.30pm, so I did a quick change and scurried off ahead of the others.

I wasn't the first. Several SLs had all arrived before me. The others appeared hard on my heels – and I was so happy to have so many of us together – including some of our overseas pals, from Ireland and Norway. We had one more guest. A good friend's dinner plans had fallen through so I pretty much bullied her into joining us. I know. I'm wicked.

We all squished in together, chattering away. We passed about the Christmas card two of us had made for Lee.

I have to say I'm impressed with the service in Brown's. Let's start with the complimentary prosecco in honour of a birthday girl. Then the speedy service of the meal itself.

We've got into the habit of sending in pre-orders on a spreadsheet. This worked really well. Not only did the kitchen staff have our starters ready, but they also had our names. So instead of "Who ordered the squid?" They could shout "Jane!"

The only downside is that a spreadsheet is only as good as the person completing it. I apologise for noting down a burger rather than chicken!

In fact the only slight wobble came when we wanted the bill. There was a little delay, which led to a bit of a panic on my part. But it turned out we'd collected the right amount to cover the meals and leave a decent tip. Our charming waitress hugged us all as we left.

Once paid up, the Stage Loppies trotted off as fast as our little legs could carry us, to the theatre.

One of us had gone on ahead as she needed to pass a ticket to Lee's New York fan. Easier said than done in that chaotic crowd, but at last we got ourselves sorted and into the theatre.

We used the very sensible 'furthest come; best seats' principle for allocating tickets. New York won that one! And I was chuffed to be sitting with good friends next to me and others in front. ☺

Of course there's always a certain amount of 'assessing the view' when you first take your place in the theatre. I rated this one as excellent. No craning my neck up; though deep, I could see the whole of the stage, right to the back and it was... well a little unusual.

A period drama must be been playing at the theatre. The stage had been turned into a drawing room with a huge pair of rococo doors in the centre of the back wall. Two giant snowmen and two Christmas trees tried their best to bring a bit of festive spirit to the set but, bless them, they looked a bit out of place.

The drum-kit and an electric keyboard in front of them made a really surreal addition.

"Oh yes, Lady Agnes, master Henry is very taken with Mr Cozy Powell, and little Agatha gave a capital performance of 'Ace of Spades' for the vicar yesterday." Perhaps not.

The crowd poured in. All around me, excited fans took their seats. The stalls filled up. Above us, faces smiled down from the dress and upper circles. Not the balcony though. That, I found out later, had been closed as it wasn't needed. Damn. Not a sell-out then: no loincloth. Pout.

I was so busy waving at friends that I almost missed John leading the band on.

John on violin, Adam on keyboard...drums, guitar and sax - and there still there seemed an expanse of stage for Lee to play with. I guess we're not at the Pheasantry anymore.

Only once the band took position, did the houselights dim.

Suddenly the doors burst open and Lee stormed onto the stage. The theatre erupted with cheers.

Ah, he might have been part of the play (Lord of the Manor even) in his elegant charcoal suit and pleated shirt. The scenery, Lee in a formal suit, is it any wonder I began reminiscing about Lord Arthur Saville's Crime?

But our Lord Arthur was already singing: "You'd better not pout..." OK Lee. I'll stop pouting, even if you're not getting the loincloth out.

And as if he could read my mind, his introduction even included a reference to his tweeted promise to appear on stage eating a mince pie wearing said loincloth, providing he sold 'every single seat'.

"And I've not sold it out! Hurrah! "

Now in fairness to Lee he'd done his best to help fill up the theatre. A gang from Holby City joined us for the evening, as well as a big group from the Sally Army.

Lee gave a shout out to them, and to his girlfriend who was also present. And once again he told the audience we're all his friends. SWEET!

Next song, 'Winter Wonderland', with plenty Meady style dancing.

Giving up the Christmas theme for a while, he sang 'Everything', 'Maria' (again nailing that big note effortlessly) and 'All of Me'. I'm so glad that's going to be on his album. It gives me goose-bumps every time I hear him sing it.

He'd abandoned his song sheets for this performance and for those opening numbers he really didn't need them. He performed each one without any noticeable slips.

OK so, yes, later we did have a few Meady moments, notably in 'Leave Right Now' when he sang the second verse instead of the first, then sang the second verse again. He pointed out his mistake.

"How does it start?" He wondered aloud.

Fans all through the theatre started singing, Lee joined in - the band struck up. It was rather lovely.

Not the loveliest moment of the show though. Oh no.

He suddenly announced "I'm in love." You could hear gasps and "awwwwss" all around the stalls.

He told us about his girlfriend and her little boy. The joy on his face made me melt with affection for him. And when he dedicated 'All I Want for Christmas is You' to her... Come on, all together now!! AAAWWWwwwww!

Lee had two sets of guests at this concert: the adorable Natasha Barnes, and a Salvation Army singing group, Four Hymn (who reminded me of Colabro).

Over the course of the concert these four smart young men sang, appropriately enough, four hymns - in the broadest sense of the word. My favourite was a beautiful rendition of 'Oh Come all ye Faithful' which I longed to sing with them. Being merciful to the people sitting near me I just mouthed.

Natasha gave us 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' then Lee joined her for 'Baby It's Cold Outside'. That was fun! The two of them had a good giggle as Lordly Lee attempted to seduce sweet innocent Natasha.

"I was in panto with him last year," she said.

"Six weeks; twice a day..." she stared up into Lee's smiling (and incredibly handsome) face. "...looking at that!" Oh the hardship Natasha!

The first half ended with 'Close Every Door'. Again, Lee invited us to imagine him behind bars. He straightened up took a breath...

"Loincloth!" someone shouted. That was it. Lee corpsed. It took him two or three attempts to get his laughter under control but when he did - oh when he did - perfection. Just perfection.

The second half came with a costume change.

Lee swapped his suit jacket for a Christmas jumper emblazoned with a snowman, bearing the motto "I'm Sexy and I Snow it." Afterwards an ecstatic friend of mine she'd was one of the group that gave it to him. (Good choice ladies! It fitted very snugly ☺).

What better apparel for more Christmas numbers... 'The Christmas Song (Chestnuts)', 'Silent Night', 'I'll be Home for Christmas'...

Mind you, 'Gethsemane'?!

How can any serious performer create the spirit of deep anguish that song requires while wearing a snowman Christmas jumper? An ill thought-through choice – or that's how I felt to start with.

He started singing. His eyes moistened. I found myself caught up in his evident pain. Oblivious to everything but his fear and despair as his prayer screamed up to heaven, I was awestruck. From horror to anger; from anger to resignation.

The song ended with that sustained bitter note executed exquisitely, and Lee almost collapsed into a deep bow.

As his final note faded the front row surged to their feet. I leaped from my seat. All around me others stood, applauded screamed out their appreciation.

And still Lee stayed bowed. Perhaps he was struggling to contain the emotion he'd unleashed.

Talking to a friend later we shared the same thought. Stand up! Stand up so you can see what's happening! A whole theatre on their feet for you!

At last he straightened. He looked almost shocked when he saw us, and then delighted. The audience sank back down.

'Gethsemane' in a Christmas jumper! Only Lee!

He lost his lovely woolly pulley before the show's end, returning after Natasha's final number ('Don't rain on my Parade' - well it had to be, didn't it?) sans jumper, sans jacket.

On to his finale - 'White Christmas'. He didn't need to ask the audience to stand, we just did - swaying along and singing. Lee's guests joined him, all sporting Christmas jumpers of their own. How charmingly, well, Christmassy.

What a perfect way to end the concert.

Yet it didn't end there.

‘White Christmas’ drew to a close but the band kept playing. The tempo speeded up, the rhythm changed...

"I closed my eyes. ..."

I somehow failed to recognise the opening bars of ‘Any Dream Will Do’. How? How on earth? Have I not heard that song enough to know it?

The crowd whooped their appreciation and our sedate swaying became more vigorous.

The traditional sing along got underway with guests and audience both providing ahh-a-ahhs a plenty.

"A crash of drums- a flash of light..." his voice soared.

"May I return to the beginning" oh how I wish you could Lee. This evening has raced by too fast.

Then unexpectedly he left the stage. What could he be up to?

Meady's voice had gone quiet so we doubled our efforts. Natasha and Four Hymn seemed as flummoxed as the audience were, but I could see them watching something happening in the wings. Then they all started laughing.

Of course! A flash of light. I've just sussed what's coming.

And on to the stage strode Lee Mead, back in his Joseph coat for the first time in nearly ten years.

The audience roared. Oh how I've missed those Canaan days!

"We are still waiting, still hesitating any dream will do."

"Any dream, any dream will-" we sang, allowing our voices to fade. Ah but he didn't let the song dwindle out softly as he usually does.

Suddenly his voice rang out.



"Give me my coloured coat! My amazing coloured coat!"

I'm not joking, the audience started squealing. I can't remember him singing the proper ending to 'Any Dream Will Do' since the cherry-picker days of the Adephi. I was, quite literally, bouncing as I cheered.

Lee twirled his coat, and he and his and guests took their bows.

"Thank you! I love you all." He said.

And we love you Lee, I thought.
Every single one of us.

With waves and good wishes,
Lee and his guests left the stage, followed by the band.

I looked around me for my coat,
and realised the houselights hadn't come back up.

Might there be an encore?

The band returned – "More! More!" and there was Lee.

"Do you want one more song?"

"Yes! Yes! More!"

Oooo how can he follow that I wondered. 'See You In My Dreams'? Another Christmas song?

Someone in the audience knew what it should be: 'Day Dream Believer!'

"Oh I could hide 'neath the wings..." sang Lee "of the blue bird as he sings." Everyone joined in.

OK. So I know they are professionals and it's their job to do this sort of thing, but I was dead impressed the way the band picked up the tune and went with it.

"Chorus!" Lee shouted.

"Cheer up sleepy Jean..."

Ahhh. Loved it!

Once we'd all stopped laughing and cheering, he gave us his real encore – 'Blackbird'.



‘Blackbird’? Who’d have thought ‘Blackbird’ would be the encore? And yet the soft, beautiful, melody made a perfect finale for what I can only describe (and forgive me I use this word a lot to describe Mr Mead’s events) a fabulous concert.

So with the curtain figuratively down (there wasn’t an actual curtain you understand) I floated out of the theatre on cloud nine.

Well not exactly. I shuffled out with the rest of stalls. Slowly. It was a bit of a squash in there.

Eventually we reached the exit – and into a snowfall. Of a kind.

Lee, disappointed with the theatre’s prohibition on internal snow, provided a flurry outside. The fans clustered in the fluffy white-stuff, taking photos, laughing – for once not minding getting slightly damp.

It was almost magical.

And that’s what Lee keeps doing. Bringing a little Meady Magic into our lives.

That’s the way to start Christmas ☺.

(editor’s note: Special thank you to Amanda from Holland for the gorgeous photos (see more of them on the Meadaholics Facebook page) – and to Jane for her wonderful reviews throughout this past year. What a pleasure it has been to be at the concerts through her shared experiences, don’t you agree? Much love to both lovely Lee Fans.)