

Pheasantry 27 Aug 2017

By Jane W

Tis said you should never start a piece of writing with an apology. Sorry but I'm starting with one. Arrghh that was an apology! I'm start with two!

I'm sorry if this report is shorter and less detailed than normal. Those of you who have become good friends know I'm having a fraught and hectic time. (Come to think of it, those of you who are nodding acquaintances probably know too. I'm an over-sharer.)

I've been so busy and had so much on my mind that Lee's August Pheasantry gig sneaked up on me almost without me noticing. One minute I was harvesting over-ripe plums with some very old friends, the next I was sitting on the train to London with a lovely Northern Lady, partaking of a small (ahem) gin and tonic. Well, it was her birthday. (Note to self: When bringing a bottle of tonic with a crown cap remember to bring a bottle opener. Good job the nice chap sitting opposite had a solution. You have to be impressed by someone who always travels with a proper bottle-jack.)

So the journey passed cheerfully with lots of chatter, until we stepped off the train into the full flourish of a gorgeous summer's day, when, like the true British ladies we are, we started complaining about the heat.

Other Northern Ladies joined us; I left them at the hotel. I had arranged to meet Julie (formerly Julie who is not a fan, now Julie who blooming well is a fan) at 5pm. I had an hour to get to The Pheasantry. No problem.

No problem? Wrong! Severe delays on the Circle Line. OK I'll use the District Line. Oh yeah for this bit it's the same track.

My calm, leisurely journey turned into yet another scurry down the Kings Road. No time for window shopping or soaking up the sunshine. I squinted up at the shop fronts spotting familiar landmarks (there's McDonald's; hurry up, Jane; there's the place with the colonnades; nearly there) until I gratefully reached the Pheasantry guardian statues and stepped into the shaded courtyard just after 5pm.

Julie wasn't there.

Now Julie doesn't turn up late so I knew she must be having some sort of difficulty. Hmm. Phone going to voicemail. Perhaps she's on the underground. I managed to avoid worrying (very unlike me) and instead joined a big group of friends who'd chosen to eat outdoors rather than wait till the club opened. Very civilised!

Julie arrived just as our friends were finishing and decamping to venue. She too had been caught in numerous transport woes. Never mind. We ate our own pizzas while enjoying a lovely tête-à-tête. We needed the catch up.

Fully fed, Julie and I headed downstairs our table. Ooo goody! One of our favourites. And right next to the Northern Ladies too. Perfect!

A little pre show mingling - including introducing myself to Scott Matthewman who, more or less, founded The Stage Loppies, the lights dim....

It's time!

Michael/Micky, John and Tommy mounted the stage and began the musicians' ritual set up.

Conversations quietened. We're ready...and here he comes, sweeping though the audience, his smile bringing a little of the summer sunshine into the candlelit basement.

He'd opted for the smart-casual look again. A lovely dark shirt with white spots (I've seen it before. It looks so soft and strokeable...not, you understand, that I've ever tried to check) and black jeans.

He started with his usual his opening number, 'Everything'. Mmmm. Who needs to order dessert when that voice is just like chocolate!

Julie hasn't been to any Pheasantry gigs before. Though I told her it's intimate she wasn't prepared for just how intimate it is.

"It's like he's singing in your lounge," she said.

It kinda is.

First song done. Time to introduce the band. I love the surprised look on his face when John gets a huge cheer.

He admitted to being more nervous than normal and joked that it was because his boss was in. Ah, so that was Guy Henry I saw striding into the venue.

As usual, he thanked everyone for coming and asked where we'd travelled from (cue cries of Yorkshire from Northern Ladies (including me)). And quickly on to the BIG news. There WILL be a Christmas concert – and there'll be snow – and Lee in a tux. Ooooo!!!! He couldn't tell us anymore about it, but keep alert!

Back to the singing. 'Grow Old With Me' followed. Those first couple of songs were perfection. But as the set progressed he started to be bothered by a tickling cough and needed to pause to get a drink of water.

"Play something," he said to the band as he poured out some water. John and Tommy struck up 'The Girl from Ipanema'. And that set Lee off dancing backwards and forwards, wiggling his hips. "That's my Strictly audition," he joked as laughter filled the little Jazz Club.

Lee in Giddy mode. I love it!

More comedy dancing before the Wham number – lots more laughter. And again, as always, we giggled our way through ‘Back for Good’ with Lee’s multiple harmonies and a backing group of audience members.

But the bit that had the whole room in hysterics came when he told us about his plans for Bank Holiday Monday – taking Betsy to a fun day in Southend.

“There’ll be trampolines and ... err ... actually, there might be just trampolines. That would be good...” Then he mimed a bored child bouncing up and down a few times...

“Next!”

And another bored child mime. He milked this for a while to our delight. After the show we spoke to our waitress. She knew Lee from Holby, and had been looking forward to hearing him sing. While very impressed with his voice, what surprised her even more was how funny Lee’s gigs are. And she said with a smile “It helps that he’s very easy on the eyes.”

Ah so she noticed that then! ☺

I’m not going to try to describe all the songs. For the most part he stuck to the normal set (though ‘Ain’t That a Kick in the Head’ came before interval), with one very welcome addition, ‘Leave Right Now’. Thank you, Mr Henry, for requesting that!

‘Leave Right Now’ certainly rates as one of my highlights of the evening, along with ‘Feeling Good’ (another quite recent addition to the set list), ‘Maria’, ‘Bring Him Home’ and ‘Close Every Door’, and ‘All of Me’. Oh and ‘Hushabye Mountain’. (Look it’s hard to chose OK?). ‘Feel’, as well. Oh yes and John’s favourite (AArrghh – I can’t think what it’s called) where John gets to do the pizzicato thing...

But my absolute favourite song of the evening ‘Why God Why’. Just. Breathtaking.

No guests that evening: 100% Mead. He didn’t flag at all. All too soon he was taking his bows after his “final” song, ‘Fix You’. The inevitable cries of “More” and of course we really finished with ‘ADWD’, featuring backing vocals by the audience AND waiting staff.

What could be better?

After the show, the traditional hugs and farewells to those catching trains. I was getting over-emotional again. The support I’ve received from Lee fans over the last few months...I’m going to get teary. You lot are wonderful!

With Julie gone I joined the Northern Ladies, who were chatting to the waiting staff and teasing the Birthday Girl, and generally having a really fun time.

Lee had returned, but was busy mingling. I waited.

Now the table the Northern Ladies sat at was excellent for watching the show, but not so great for making a quick exit. Lee was approaching but most of the Birthday Girl's friends were pretty much trapped in their seats.

One of the gang me-moed to me.

Isn't incredible how someone like me can interpret a quick head nod as a head gesture as: "Hurry up Jane, get to Lee while you have the chance. Ask him for a photo with the Birthday Girl. I can't move I'm stuck between the pillar and this waiter."

The English language is wonderfully expressive. Body language can be just as good.

Up I sprang (of course) and, at the next appropriate opportunity I collared Lee.

"Excuse me, Lee." I said.

He turned to me with THAT smile, and I nearly lost my nerve – and any ability to communicate. Come on, Jane. You're a woman with a mission.

"Yes?"

Don't look in his eyes, don't look in his eyes...

"My friend is celebrating her [age omitted for fear of being lynched] birthday, and we wondered..."

He looked over at her.

"Never!" he exclaimed.

Arrghh! I'm off script AND I've just looked him in the eyes!

"Would you mind having your picture taken with her?" I blurted out.

There I'd done it. OK knees you can turn to jelly now.

I needn't have worried.

Lee was already calling out to the Birthday Girl, laughing as she, caught off guard, gabbled a reply. After some shuffling through the crowd he managed to get to her, and posed for some lovely photos while having what was evidently a lovely chat.

At last he moved on. Other fans were waiting for a few words, and that gracious young man spent time with everyone.

Meanwhile Birthday Girl was bouncing like a trampolinist on cloud nine

And I was grinning like an idiot.

Damn! I forgot to tell him that I loved the show.

But I think, perhaps he'd have got that.