

Pheasantry August 2019

Friday 9th August

Nothing causes more excitement in the bonkers world of Lee fandom than a concert at the Pheasantry. Well except, of course, a lead musical theatre role... Or a regular role in a major ongoing drama series... Or a Christmas concert... When we found out he was producing a play for the first time, that was pretty exciting... and the pantos always get me bouncing...

Scratch that, I'll start again.

Despite all the thrilling projects Lee's been involved with over the years, his gigs at a tiny jazz club in Chelsea still cause a shiver of excitement whenever they're announced. (That's better - or at least it's more accurate.)

The BBC forecast downpours on Friday, high winds Saturday and sunny spells on Sunday, but the weather seemed to have different ideas.

Friday so far, in London at least, stayed dry throughout the day. OK, not a heavenly arch of azure skies exactly, but no lowering clouds either. With uncharacteristic optimism I donned my pink floaty sun frock, expecting to at least reach the venue before the weather changed.

The bus drew up in Sloane Square. OK still not too bad: more clouds thickened the sky, and a stiff breeze had sprung up, sending my skirts swirling, but I quite welcomed the fresher air it bought with it. London can be oppressively hot in summer.

We arrived at the Pizza Express to find two friends ensconced in the courtyard.

Despite the breeze, we decided to eat outside, in the cool. We chose a table under the shelter of a big canopy in case the forecast rain should make its appearance.

With plenty of time before the Pheasantry doors opened, the four of us pondered the new menu.

The breeze picked up, rattling the canopy over our heads.

A waitress appeared. We ordered food and wine and continued our chatter, pausing only to greet other fans as they appeared.

Serviettes fluttered in their holder. The menus stored at the waiter's station wobbled.

A group of Lee fans sitting close by the door picked up their drinks and moved inside.

"I think we're OK out here, aren't we?" I said as the conversation lulled.

"Yes,"

"Fine,"

"It's stuffy inside."

We carried on talking.

On the table next to us a man stood up. The wind seized his seat cushion. In a spectacular cosmic game of nature's ten pin bowling, the wind scored a strike against the cutlery holder, an empty glass and a wine cooler.

"Ooo," we said. Or words to that effect.

We stayed put.

The waitress bought the drinks. I eyed my long-stemmed wine glass with some reservation.

The wind made paper aeroplanes out of the serviettes on the staff station.

"So," I said as a particularly aerodynamic napkin soared passed my face, "how long are you in London for?"

"Just tonight, I have to leave early in the morning."

A random olive rolled past. (Actually it didn't. But I feel at this point in the narrative a random olive should have rolled passed, so I'm going with it.)

The group on the table next to us settled up and headed off.

"Padana Leggara?"

A smiling waitress, handed out our dinners.

I studied my uncut pizza, the pizza wheel, my knife and fork, and the top-heavy wine glass. The half empty bottle trapped in the wine cooler gave a warning rattle.

Hmmm. I picked up the wheel, still grasping the wine glass's stem and attempted to saw my dinner into eatable chunks. The motion shook the table.

I gave up on one-handed-pizza-chopping and formed a new plan. Pizza Express serves pizzas on chopping boards. I eased the base of my wine glass under the edge of my board and trapping both firmly with my wrist managed at last to chop up my meal.

Ha! Sorted!

The canopy above flapped in an alarming manner. The last of the diners who'd braved the blustery weather paid their bills and left.

The staff collapsed the empty tables surrounding us. They didn't want to serve anyone else outside. Can I blame them? Let's see – nope.

The rain started.

It came in squalls, lightish ones, blown in from the most sheltered side of the courtyard, so initially we remained perfectly dry.

Then a change in wind direction exposed us to the shower.

Abandoning for the moment our carry-on-regardless attitude we shunted the table further under cover.

5.45pm. Three quarters of an hour before the Pheantry doors open. We'd finished eating, and the staff had cleared away the empties, leaving less ammunition for the wind to hurl at us. With the table shunted further into shelter, we agreed to remain outside. We called for more wine.

The rain fell steadily now but the wind had dropped and as we were still protected from the elements, we carried on chatting.

"I remember sitting out in a thunderstorm in Rome," I said, but my interesting story of British eccentricity abroad went unheard.

The deluge promised by the BBC came. All at once.

The torrential rain bounced from the paving stones and splashed at my ankles.

Our whole gang huddled as best we could as far away from the edge of the canopy as possible.

I picked up my skirt and realised that the hem had trailed in a puddle. Words like 'capillary action' and 'wicking' came to mind as I lifted my sodden frock for my friends to see.

"I'm bit wet."

The torrent still bombarded the courtyard.

We now were all staring at the restaurant door wondering how sodden we would get in the three yards between our nearly dry sanctuary and it.

I ran.

The others ran.

We stood in the restaurant in fits of hysterical laughter.

"That," I said, "is one meal we'll remember."

We filed into the little jazz club in soggy clothes but very high spirits.

The days of queuing for hours on the stairs to bag a prime spot are mercifully over, but there's a downside - we have little control over where we sit. These days it's the staff who allocate tables on a first-to-book basis, however even for those who are quick off the mark disappointments can happen.

Not for me though that day. I was far from disappointed: the manager led us to my favourite table.

There are many reasons to love these gigs at The Pheantry, not least the wonderfully friendly atmosphere. With the considerate staff that understand the madness of Lee fandom and most of the 80 seats filled by familiar people, I felt as though I'd joined one big party.

The cabaret style allows coming and going between tables in the hour before showtime so it's an excellent opportunity to catch up with mates and perhaps bond with new acquaintances.

For Lee, its clear The Pheasantry is an ideal place to test out new material on a supportive audience. I looked forward to hearing one or two new songs to The Meadster's repertoire or perhaps some old favourites revisited.

I was still chatting when the band began to thread their way through the audience: Adam, Tommy, John (woo hoo!) and a double bassist, who I didn't recognise, called Don.

Then the announcement we'd been waiting for:

“Ladies and gentlemen,” (mostly ladies I think you will find) “Lee Mead!”

Whoops and cheers for the announcement, then renewed whooping and cheering as the man himself made his way to the stage.

He looked about the room, and began to sing.

“Some of us belong to the stars...”

Had I not been immediately mesmerised by his shining eyes, I might had been just a tad dissatisfied with his starting this new Pheasantry set with the same song with which he begins the My Story concerts. Fortunately, that didn't occur to me. Instead I smiled along as the familiar words poured from his lips, while he flirted with his audience, inviting us all to join him on his journey to stardom.

Once finished, and he'd made his modest nods in acknowledgement of our applause, he welcomed us, introduced his band, and said a few words in praise of the Pheasantry.

Then straight on to the next number, ‘To Love Someone’, the first of many new additions.

I know now that The Bee Gees first wrote and recorded ‘To Love Someone’. That evening though, I remembered someone singing it in the late 80's or early 90's. I spent an inordinate amount of time trying pin down that memory, instead of absorbing the rather beautiful cover being sung that night. (If you're interested it turned out to be a Ska version by Jimmy Sommerville, which is quite good. Lee's is better.)

Lee wasn't particularly voluble between songs – in fact he'd pared all his links down this weekend, perhaps conscious of not straying into ‘My Story’ territory too much. But in the next intro he did say a bit more about the upcoming number.

“I sang this in my first amateur production...”

Ah ha! This'll be ‘Seventeen’, I thought. I sniggered.

It turned out to be a louder and dirtier snigger than I'd intended.

Lee looked straight at me.

“Oh, someone knows what's coming,” he said with a grin.

I wasn't wrong. And I gathered from the chortling around me the rest of the patrons in the Pheasantry found Rick's musings on the tragedy of being a seventeen-year-old virgin as funny as I do.

Two more show-stoppers from the My Story Tour found their way onto the set list: 'Music of the Night', and 'Close Every Door', joyfully restored to its full length. Plus 'Make You Feel My Love' and of course 'Any Dream Will Do', which he has to give us else we'd probable riot. OK tut loudly.

He included other recent Meady favourites, 'Fix You' and 'Blackbird'.

I'm not including 'Better' in the list of recent favourites because it's been an age since he's sung it live. And that goes for 'Gethsemane' too.

Nor am I including 'Paint it Black' because, although it featured on the 10th Anniversary Tour, this is a completely new arrangement which changes the feel of the song completely.

They've focused on the strings – Don's double bass and John's crazy, almost klezmer music, violin. Lee weaves the modern western melody through this, creating a weird, oddly potent hybrid of sounds.

Lee described the effect as 'gothic'. I'm not sure I agree with that, but it is sinister and portentous and I loved it.

I will not fall out with anyone who doesn't agree with me. I suspect this will be one of those marmite pieces that divides even the most devoted fans' opinions.

I also want to talk about 'Drops of Jupiter'. This one really surprised me as I never guessed he'd ever tackle this live. I'm delighted that he did.

His recording on his second album (no Mr Mead listen to your fans SECOND album, not FIRST – sheesh we did not manage to get that through to him all weekend) barged into my top ten best loved tracks on first listen.

A couple of months later a friend introduced me to the original by Train. Given that Train wrote one song I adored I figured I'd like to hear more, so bought a couple of albums, went to see them in concert... now I'm quite a serious Train fan. Thank you Lee; you introduced me to more music that I love. I wouldn't have heard of Train were it not for you.

Digression over.

Where was I?

Oh yes Jupiter – Drops of.

'Drops of Jupiter' is a great song but the lyrics are real 'illegitimate people' to learn. I've been singing it to myself for the best part of ten years (not constantly; I do get other earworms) and I still get my atmospheres, constellations, deep-fried chicken, and freeze-dried romances muddled. (That'll make no sense to anyone who's not heard it!)

I thought Lee so brave to tackle it in front of a live audience, even one so forgiving as the Pheantry crowd.

Yes – he used a prompt sheet, which he acknowledged unabashed. (I did say the lyrics are bastards, didn't I?) Yes – they'd slowed down the tempo slightly to allow him time to announce.

And yes – it was fabulous.

In a remarkably confident performance, Lee gave the surreal words a meaning that I'd simply not noticed before. Oh it's about a woman returning to her lover after abandoning him to 'find herself'! I had genuinely never sussed that.

This is what Lee is so great at – helping you delve beyond the music and the pretty phrases so you can really understand what the writer is trying to say. And I love the slight edge of sarcasm with which he imbues the line 'Was it lonely looking for yourself out there?'

[Having googled since then I've found out that's not what Pat Monahan is singing about but that doesn't matter. It is what Lee is singing about.]

We expected some brand-new songs and he gave them to us in abundance.

I could probably live without Elton John's 'Don't go Breaking my Heart', but 'Yesterday', 'Feels Like Home', 'God Only Knows' and 'What Kind of Fool Am I?' are very welcome additions to the Meadster's set lists.

His Friday night concert also featured a Q & A session, probably to give him a bit of a rest, seeing as he didn't have a guest that night. Not many questions (perhaps we'd all gone a bit shy) but we found out more about his upcoming appearance in the comedy series Motherland. Lee told us that he's playing himself, and that in it he lives in a mansion with a small dog. It'll be airing in October. Look out for it everyone!

The concert ended, as it had begun, in the same manner as My Story, with 'Make You Feel My Love'. However he did something very surprising. He led up to it with 'Amazing Grace' sung a cappella, then went straight into 'Make You Feel My Love'. Why? Not a clue. It sounded good though.

Finally, after the traditional cries of "more", he sang 'Any Dream Will Do' complete with enthusiastic audience participation ah-ah-ha! And raucous standing ovation. How else could the evening end?

Saturday 10th August

My friends and I had big...OK moderate sized plans for Saturday; an excursion to the British Museum.

I went to the British Museum as a youngster and remember gawping at the gargantuan statues from ancient Egypt. I also remember being hurried away by my companions before I'd sated my appetite for pharaohs and queens. I have never returned to finish my gawp.

Meady tours gave me an opportunity – and my lovely friends agreed to join me. ☺.

On this occasion we had one extra 'friend' Beatrix Bunny would be joining us at last. She does cause quite a laugh.

We arranged our rendezvous at Café Nero in Russell Square, and after consuming such fare as a coffee-house purveys for luncheon we embarked on a sedate perambulation to the

museum. (Look I write in plain English day in day out at work, sometimes I just like to make a flourish.)

From a distance we caught sight of the entrance.

I tried to keep upbeat but I didn't fancy standing in that line. By the looks of things we could end up waiting so long that we'd need to leave before we reached the bag-check desk.

"Let's find something else to do."

So next stop the Petrie Museum, to get our fix of ancient Egypt.

As I stepped into the Petrie Museum and saw the tightly-lighted packed display cases surrounding me I thought maybe I'd time travelled back to the 30's. Antiquities, each with a small type-written label, lay crammed together, higgledy-piggledy. It reminded me of my childhood, staring into glass cabinets at local archaeological finds, in some out of the way village or other.

It sounds like I'm being critical doesn't it?

I'm not.

I loved hunting among the artefacts for treasures hiding in plain sight: beautiful hieroglyphics, dainty beads, and the minutiae of daily life for the uber religious ancients. A display of shabtis (grave figurines intended to work for the dead soul) had me entranced for an age.

To help visitors navigate their way around the jumbled collection, the museum provided fact sheets about 10 must see items. Finding all ten and taking turns to read the descriptions to the others gave a fun, educational purpose to our visit. A very simple but effective idea. More museums should try something similar.

Oh and one last thing we discovered. Prepare to be shocked.

LEE HAS NEVER WORN A LOINCLOTH!!!!

I know, it's impossible, isn't it. But it turns out that a loincloth is a nappy-like garment worn as underwear by the upper classes. What Lee wore, and what we see pharaohs sporting, is a kilt.

So there you go.

On to the main event.

On Saturday we decided to eat inside The Pizza Express for a change, largely because the staff had folded up all the outdoor tables. We regarded this as a hint.

It might not have been the novel dining experience of the day before, but we enjoyed our food remaining hot while we ate it.

We finished in nice time to head downstairs as the doors to the Pheasantry opened. The manager showed us to the same tables as the previous evening. I plonked myself down in my favourite seat, popped Beatrix Bunny on the table, and prepared to be (even) happy(er).

OK Lee we're ready when you are!

Just as the night before, the audience greeted Lee's excellent band with enthusiastic applause then the man himself with huge cheers.

He grinned as he sang 'Some of us Belong to the Stars', and once his first song ended turned to us all with glittering eyes.

"Were any of you here yesterday?"

Cheers from all around the club.

"All of you!" He laughed.

Well not all perhaps, but a very significant number at least. Time was he acted quite flummoxed at the thought of his fans coming repeatedly to these little shows. These days he'd be surprised if we didn't.

He introduced 'To Love Somebody'.

"This was originally recorded by the Bee Gees," he told us as he settled himself upon the stool next to the piano.

Adam played the opening chords, and the other instruments followed.

Lee, head bent so his long curls obscured his eyes, swayed gently in time, lost in his friends' music.

Then he straightened up, stared into the distance with the tender expression of an ardent lover. He opened his mouth.

And did a Bee Gees impression.

"There's a light, a certain kind of light..." he sang in a sharp falsetto.

Adam almost fell off the piano stool.

The music petered out as the rest of the band collapsed into giggles, drowned out by the laughter from the fans.

"I'm sorry!" Lee was pretty much doubled up himself, "I couldn't help myself!"

Oh I think we all forgave him.

His set list for Saturday was the same as Friday's except that it included a guest spot from the lovely Lilly Streames, David Streames' daughter.

She's a talented lass, with a beautiful voice and pleasant, modest demeanour, not dissimilar to Mr Mead's. She gave us two songs.

I didn't care for the first. It's from a new musical (sorry I can't remember its name) and didn't work properly out of context. On the other hand, Lilly put her whole heart into giving us a full, well-acted performance. Another thing she has in common with Lee.

Next she sang ‘Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me’ in honour of her father and his friends. Now that song I really enjoyed. Her sultry, swing version suited her style and added bit of class to the evening.

Not that Lee isn’t classy.

Unless he’s doing an unexpected Bee Gee’s impression.

I’m not complaining about the amount of material in Lee’s Pheasantry set-lists but, boy does the time pass quickly. Before long he’d come to the end of the first half.

“Now I hear there’s a new version of Joseph playing in the West End this summer,” he said “Anyone seen it?”

One or two voices raised in the affirmative.

He smiled.

“I played Joseph too. This is just to remind you.”

And before our eyes he became Joseph again. Joseph in a three-piece suit (rather than a KILT), but as he lifted his head in supplication I could almost see the bars of a prison cell.

The passion he put into that song! The heart-break, the boldness, the power, all manifested in a superb voice soaring up to the final heaven-piercing note filling the small jazz-club.

I found myself on my feet applauding and cheering, surrounded by others evidently affected the same way.

And that his how ‘Close Every Door’ should be sung. Accept no substitutes.

Second half.

To be honest I’m not keen on ‘Don’t Go Breaking My Heart’.

For a start it’s not easy to turn a duet into a solo. Lee sang both parts. I suppose the lyrics of Lee’s version could be construed as “Don’t go breaking my heart [and] I won’t go breaking your heart.” That’s a stretch, though, and it changes the tone of the piece too.

I’d have enjoyed it more if he’d sung it with Lilly, but it’s never going to be one of my favourites.

Sorry to criticise one of Lee’s choices, I won’t do it again. Umm, hopefully.

Let’s talk about another new piece.

‘Feels Like Home’, is a gorgeous song and it suits Lee so very well.

It’s a sweet, wistful ballad with a melody sitting right in the middle of Lee’s range. It might not be a challenge for him - you might even call it safe – but as ever Lee gives it that little extra, a touch of his heart.

On Saturday night ‘It Feels Like Home to Me’ became extra special. It’s Issy’s favourite song, and he dedicated it to his lovely lady, who had joined the audience that evening.

Heart – melted.

Contrast this with ‘Gethsemane’.

Now that’s what I call a challenging song. Listening to Lee, I do sometimes forget what a difficult piece it is. That night I was reminded though.

Lee lost himself among the deceptively repetitive verses, leading to him pausing for a long while as he listened to his band. Eventually he managed to get back on track, and he took up the song again with confidence.

Anyone who’d never heard Gethsemane before probably would not have noticed, but Lee as gracious as ever pointed out the slip and apologised for it.

Don’t worry Lee. You’re with friends here tonight. None of us mind a little oops.

‘Yesterday’ isn’t tricky to sing, but it brings a different challenge: it’s extremely well known.

I’ve just Googled ‘Yesterday’ to see how often it’s been covered. According to an article in The Independent it’s the second most covered song of all time with (wait for it) seven million recorded versions. However, as the same article lists Eleanor Rigby as the most covered song with 131 versions, I strongly suspect the writer was in the middle of a Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime script moment.

In any case, it’s been covered a whole lot, so Meady has his work cut out bringing something different to it. Does he manage? Yup. He brings himself. That’s more than enough.

Lee never gave us the chance to show our appreciation for ‘Yesterday’. It segued straight into ‘Blackbird’, my favourite Beatles’ track, largely due to the intricate guitar accompaniment. Thank you, Tommy, for doing it such justice.

I love the Beatles, and am particularly fond of Paul McCartney’s music, so I’m just enraptured with these two back to back pieces.

Once we finished applauding, Lee raised hi self from the stool - and stumbled.

“Ow!” he said stretching an rubbing his leg, “I’ve gone stiff.”

The audience, no doubt still soaring with the blackbird on his broken wings took a moment to react.

Then the titters started.

They crept around the room growing steadily louder as mystified Meady looked from one face to another.

“What?”

By this time Adam, John, Don, and Tommy were practically rolling around the stage in hysterics.

Lee just rolled his eyes.

“So this next song...”

If I am perfectly frank, I can't remember what the next song was but I want to talk about 'Amazing Grace' and now is a good time to do it.

Bit of a curve ball having 'Amazing Grace' in the set. You can't accuse Lee of boring choices can you?

He sings it exactly as he did in 'Someone Who'll Watch Over Me', unaccompanied and in a cut down, messed about version (appropriate for the play where it's sung by a character who's not a professional singer nor a church goer). This version has three verses if you count the repeat of the first verse, with the second being an amalgamation of two traditional verses.

Coincidentally I went to a wedding on Wednesday where we sang the whole thing. Seven verses. No repeat.

Would I want to listen to Lee sing all seven verses? Hell yes!! Err sorry Heavens yes!!

The strength and passion he put into it! And I love way he delicately deals with the turns (those little embellishments: amaz-i-i-ing grace) and confidently strides through the tune, without the benefit of backing. Not even a tuning note.

Then as his last note faded Adam struck up the opening chord for 'Make You Feel My Love' and Lee was in perfect harmony with it.

Amazing job!

Before the show ended, Lee gave his heart-felt thanks to the Pheasantry staff.

"I love playing here," he told them "I've tried other places but this is the best."

Awww!

Then after cheers and cries of "more", 'Any Dream Will Do' to finish up with our favourite sing-along.

Sunday 11th August

How great to wake up the day after a concert and have to rush off - nowhere!

A lie in, a cup of tea in bed... then a day spent in London, pacing ourselves no more energetically than dawdle.

The most onerous problem to deal with where to have breakfast?

Oh it's 10 am already. Where to have brunch?

Google gave us plenty of advice, but nothing meeting our exacting criteria: pleasant, inexpensive, unlikely to be packed...

Oops it's lunchtime.

We chose Gourmet Burgers, which offered a varied, reasonably price menu in relative quiet.

Good call!

Tummys full, we caught the bus to Chelsea.

The last Pheasantry show of the year was upon us.

We settled down at our tables.

Much as I'm enjoying Lee's My Story tour, with Adam on the piano, there really is nothing to compare with Lee being backed by his full band.

There's not a weak link among them.

John is still a very much the fan favourite, thanks not only to his virtuoso violin performance, but also his enthusiasm and consistent cheerfulness. It's a delight to watch him on stage, and a pleasure whenever we get a moment to chat with him off stage.

He's always greeted enthusiastically; however, we gave every member of Lee's band a huge, welcoming cheer.

Tommy is an extremely talented guitarist. You know how much I rave about his delicate accompaniment in 'Blackbird'. Well let's not sell the guy short. He's brilliant on every song.

I missed Ritchie on bass but Don was a worthy replacement. And a double bass is always a treat!

Finally, Adam, who is not only an excellent pianist but an excellent MD too, keeping the group together and adapting should – ahem – any unpredicted changes suddenly occur.

I'd say Lee is lucky to have such a group to work with, but it's not luck is it? They all evidently love working with Lee and with each other. Long may it be so!

Three days of gigs on the trot must take it out of a performer. Lee showed no signs of tiredness. In fact, I think this last evening was the best of all, with Lee in remarkable vocal form and a room almost entirely filled with excited fans.

'Some of us Belong to the Stars', 'To Love Somebody', 'Seventeen', 'Music of the Night'...

Mmm 'Music of the Night', I've just gone back to that evening, gazing at Lee, totally enamoured by his portrayal of Phantom. The man was born for that role. Though with his tendency to make dubious characters adorable I suspect Christine might dump Raoul and run off with the sexy bad guy. I would.

Anyway, Lee gave us all that first half. Good job he had a break! As provided by one Stephen Rahman-Hughes.

It's odd. Although I don't always like Stephen's song choices or jazz stylings, I always look forward to seeing him perform. He's an entertainer.

That evening he gave us two songs by Peter Gabriel. One wasn't a surprise to me – I'd heard a snippet of it the sound check. The other was completely new to me.

Having heard Stephen's 'The Washing of the Water' I can't imagine how Peter Gabriel might sing it. I enjoyed Stephen's performance despite its jazziness but I've been wondering whether I'd prefer Mr Gabriel's original. (I've just Googled it. Nope!)

Though I expected the next song I suspect it caught the rest of the audience unaware. 'Don't Give Up' is an unlikely choice for a man's solo.

I suppose you could say the same of Lee's 'Don't Go Breaking my Heart'; it is, after all, another duet between a man and a woman. It's not made up of equal parts though. The lady's role is far lighter and with Lee singing both parts it just about made sense as a solo.

You can't so the same with 'Don't Give Up'. The female role, pleading with her partner, to err well not to give up is integral, counterpointing the man's despairing narrative as he fails to find work.

So Stephen needed to portray both roles. It's been done before (David Bowie with 'Space Oddity' springs to mind), but how would Stephen manage?

Singing the Peter Gabriel part, he was fab: desolate, noble, broken – and the tune fits perfectly in Stephen's vocal range.

But the woman's part he's taking on was originally performed by the extraordinary Kate Bush. Stephen made a valiant effort but it just didn't work. Pity.

Lee ended the first half with another utterly stunning rendition of 'Close Every Door' which brought almost everyone to their feet.

Such a happy crowd of fans that night. I used interval to catch up with loads of friends. The time whizzed by and before long we were all returning to our seats.

The lights dimmed.

Another remarkable set from Lee. I really don't think there was a weak moment in the whole evening. I must do some waxing lyrical about two songs in particular.

Firstly 'Gethsemane'.

"I first sang this song at Andrew Lloyd Webber's birthday..." he began.

"Kilworth!" shouted several voices from the audience.

"Hmm???"

"KILWORTH!" shouted most of the audience.

"I first sang this at Kilworth? Oh yes. Kilworth. Lovely venue."

Lots of murmurs of agreement around the room.

I hope Lee never goes on one of those quiz shows where celebrities see if they know more about their own career than their fans coz really – he's got some amazingly knowledgeable fans.

Anyway, it wasn't Lee's intro that made 'Gethsemane' so riveting. It was Lee himself.

No fluffs this time – just a perfect and powerful rendering of one of the most challenging songs in musical theatre.

From the weary pleading of the opening, though to his desperate attempt to negotiate his fate with God, Lee builds the songs up to the great scream that marks a turning point, “Why should I die?”

Then on to the frantic demands “Show me there’s a reason for you wanting me to die!” and almost petulant acceptance – which seems to come in response to an unheard reprimand from The Father. Lee takes us through all these emotions, until worn down he finally agrees to God’s demands “Take me now before I change my mind” sung exhaustedly at first, but repeated with strength and defiance ending with a long resounding note reverberating through the room.

Nailed it!

We stood for that one too.

The other song I particularly want to mention is ‘What Kind of Fool Am I?’

It’s a song I ought to know intimately as my dad used to play it. Unfortunately, I never learned it (the tune isn’t easy to follow unless you know it well) so it never became one of our daddy/daughter duets (unlike ‘And I Love Her’ and ‘Say Ye Who Borrow’).

‘What Kind of Fool Am I?’ is by Anthony Newley, an artist Lee likes. It was also recorded by Norman Wisdom... Hmm Lee’s been linked with a potential Norman Wisdom film...Hmmm should we read anything into this new choice of song?

If I’m honest I wasn’t that taken when Lee performed it first. He seemed tentative in the early verses (though I have since been told that’s how Anthony Newley performed it). By his third rendition though Lee had struck a balance between acting the nervous character and delivering the song.

My reservations about the opening verses disappeared as Lee built the song in his trade-mark way until the final beautiful, heart-breaking notes had the room sighing in unison.

Afterwards he explained that he’d been remembering Anthony Newley’s performances while singing and gave us an impression of him complete with cockney accent and highly stylised mannerisms.

Lee’s time at the Pheasantry was drawing to a close.

Once again he complimented the staff (noting, with a smile, that his photograph had now been relegated to a more distant pillar), and assured them that he’s be coming back...rather than...well...another than a similar venue that he’s tried recently. Our enthusiastic cheers were echoed by the staff.

Sadly, the time had come to wrap up Lee’s 2019 Pheasantry shows. I can never feel sad when singing along to ‘Any Dream Will Do’ especially when surrounded by so many friends. Never had the audience chorus sounded so confident. Everyone held back on the first verse, then everyone joined in with ah-a-ahs on the second verse, swaying and waving their arms in time. Lee beamed from the stage. He might have been the happiest man in the world that moment.

As he gave us the big-finish we stood for our third (it might even have been fourth) standing ovation of the evening.

And so, after finishing our drinks and waving bye bye to Lee, we trundled out into the warm evening. A large group of friends still filled with excitement, chatting merrily as we walked towards Sloane Square.

As I have said so many times, I do feel blessed that I am able to go to these concerts. I know not everyone can.

Thank you so much to the friends that help it happen, to the Pheasantry staff, to the band and all the guests and of course to Mr Mead himself. See you next time!