

## **Now comes THE FINAL show..... Toni continues her story.....**

There was to be no galloping to this one. More of a trudge.  
And already I was wobbling.  
On the way in I thanked Howard for looking after Lee for us for the last 18 months and for keeping him safe. He replied that it had been a pleasure.

In the foyer you could almost feel the anticipation and the nerves.  
And there at the box office was Denise Van Outen collecting her ticket and then stood by the door way making a phone call. How I wanted to ask her to tell him all that was in my head, but of course I couldn't. And Lees parents and Casey, mingling amongst us.  
And Zoe Tyler with Minty from Eastenders, who was complaining about how cold it was.  
I stood in the huge crowd and just watched all the people, emotions so evident.....excitement, anticipation. So many faces I recognised... not always able to put a name to them, but knowing that if I wanted to, I could just walk up and strike up a conversation. It was a nice feeling, to feel that I 'belonged' here... that this was exactly where I needed to be on this night , even if a small part of me just really didn't want to be.

In my seat, row C right in the middle, the lady behind me said 'I don't know if I'm ready for this'. I dabbed my eyes with my tissue and willed myself not to cry YET again, for my head was still throbbing form the matinee. Get a grip!!!!  
I could see Lee's family sat several rows behind me-perhaps row G?

The orchestra warmed up for Lee's final performance.  
And then, we were off!  
The cast played this one straight.... no mucking about... no making light of THIS show, Lee's final chance to shine as the brilliant star he is. Each and every one of the cast pulled out all the stops to make it a spectacle. Jenna let rip. I really got the sense she was trying to give her best ever performance, for the effort she was putting in was quite evident as she took huge lungfuls of breath in order to power her voice up to the rafters.  
And then 'THAT' moment.... when he appears. I cannot even begin to describe the noise.... the huge surge as EVERYONE leapt to their feet, arms aloft all hailing Lee.

'Do you think he can see us?' Alex whispered to me.

I had no idea, as once again I could not actually see him clearly, due to the tears in my eyes, but I know he had a broad grin on his face.  
He sang for all he was worth. Sang it with everything he had.  
And he nailed every single note. He was truly phenomenal.

Close Every Door brought goose bumps out on every inch of my skin.  
And once again he received a standing ovation as an homage to his brilliance.  
Go, Go Joseph saw some great interaction and facial expressions between Lee and Jenna and the audience clapped along with exuberance. The dancing from Lee - from everyone - had an energy of its own and I felt as though I could burst with how amazing I felt.

During the interval, coming down from the high, it hits us again that this is the last time. We watch as Tim Rice is ushered behind a curtain into a small sectioned off area in the bar. We laugh as we read the front of a man's T-shirt 'Loppy's OH', and laugh more at the words on the back 'Jan 10th , Lee Mead's last night. Can I have my wife back now?' ( Apologies if I haven't remembered quite right!)

Second half, and its all going too fast as usual hurtling towards the end.  
Only this feels more desperate because it is the very end.

Lee plays Princey Lee magnificently, shouting for all he is worth, all his best expressions on show.  
And then the time comes for him to re-unite with Jacob.

The cast draw apart to show the chariot.

But it is not the usual Joseph in there, with his stern face and commanding air.

This is just Lee Mead, momentarily being himself, and he is responding to yet another standing ovation, to a huge roar from us as he approaches and he is grinning from ear to ear, basking in our adoration.

And then the moment I have dreaded. He sings to Jacob, almost a whisper, so tender.  
And Stephen reaches out to him, pulls him in and hugs him goodbye, patting him hard on the back.... Jenna joins him and she does well to continue singing as she is obviously moved, and she holds tight to Lee's hands she wrinkles her nose at him and smiles through her tears.....  
then the cast join them with that crescendo of noise that is the line  
'May I return to the beginning'.

And knowing that we actually cannot return to the beginning,  
I honestly think my heart is going to break.

Lee powers out 'give me my coloured coat', neck veins bulging.....and the crowd goes wild. CED reprise sees Lee singing for the last time to the children, and it may be my imagination, but the faces of the youngsters I could see seem to be gazing at him in complete adoration as he smiled at them so warmly.

The mega mix was just phenomenal - we showed our appreciation to the cast and they gave it back in spades.

Neal whipped us into a frenzy with 'I can't hear youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu....it's Lee's last night' the roof almost flew off the Adelphi. It seemed every time we were asked to give more, to make more noise, we found an extra bit of shouting power. And then that dreaded, haunting music which heralds Lee's final ascent to the heavens began. He ran out with curls a-flying, coat whipping around as he spun. He blasted his final few lines out and looked so incredibly happy. How on earth his parents must have felt I just don't know, but I was fit to explode with pride myself.

As he came down I turned just for a few seconds, and tapped Alex on the shoulder so that she could turn and witness the sight that Lee could also see - a whole theatre...stalls, dress circle, upper circle, boxes, on its feet, faces smiling, arms waving, people leaning over the barriers, complete bedlam.

It really was an awesome sight to see and hear so many people saluting him. I continued to cry, but my tears had actually run dry, had been used up, and I just had an unbearably hot and salty face. As Adam and Russell unhooked Lee from the cherry picker they patted him on the back, nodding as if to say 'Good job, mate'.

The noise went on...and... on...and on.... Through the curtain call...and on. Just as I thought it could get no louder-it did. When I thought it was about to peter out - another wave came... just a total wall of sound, a cacophony of noise that drowned out all else. For a few brief moments Lee's smile slipped from his face, he bowed his head and bent over slightly, hands between his knees, eyes shut. I obviously do not know what he was thinking, but I would hazard a guess that it was something like

**'I can't believe this...this is for me and I am overwhelmed'.**

But he gathered himself, his smile returned, he smiled and thanked us.

An enormous roar went up as Andrew Lloyd Webber appeared and congratulated Lee, and presented him with the coat that the brothers rip from him.

He put it on but the back was open and he tried to shrug it on twice but he was uncomfortable and hot so he took it off again. We cheered as he did and Lee camped it up, pulling a pouty face and wiggling his hips, which set us off again.

He looked tiny in his white jeans and shirt, which was rucked up at the back by his mic belt.

ALW said Lee was the best ever Joseph and that we had got our choice 'spectacularly right'.

Amazingly for this private and shy man Lee seemed totally at ease giving his speech.

He obviously felt at home in this theatre filled with love. Someone called out 'I love you, Lee' and he answered 'Love you too'. There was laughter and then as it quietened someone shouted the same thing and he replied again 'I love you too'. We laughed again, and it could have been a very long night at this rate but Mackers added to the mood by proclaiming her love for Russell, which Lee found very amusing!

Gracious as ever, Lee thanked all those that had made his dream a reality, found time to applaud the cast who 'slog their guts out 8 times a week', wish Gareth Gates luck saying

'I know he's going to be great'.

His final words were to the audience, thanking them for their support. And he said 'to those who have been more than once - thank you so much' and then, quite emphatically, he pointed with both hands and said 'I'll see you soon.' The place erupted and then he waved goodbye as the curtain descended. Craig was filming most of this, turning the camera on the audience to record the spectacle for posterity.

It was slow progress out to the scrum, largely because my eyes were not focusing very well at all! We were right at the back with the policemen who tried valiantly to keep us on the pavement but eventually gave up and put out some cones in the road. There was no chance of seeing more than a flash of the beanie but the atmosphere was worth savouring and the sight of all the cameras being held aloft was something special. A rather determined man with a little girl on his shoulders called and whistled to Lee and the girl eventually got a wave from Lee when he was about 6 rows from the front. The crowd cheered her success in getting his attention and eventually she made it far enough forward to reach over for a hug.

For final closure we wandered back to the stage door and stood with a large group of like minded people. I just watched as various cast members came out for a smoke – each one greeted by name and a wave from the crowd. Craig continued to film the street scene from an upstairs window and then came down to give members of CSAS a much appreciated chat. He returned later with a bottle of wine and some cups for another group, which I suspect was smuggled from the backstage party.

We watched Lee's dressing room light go on and off several times, but eventually agreed it was time to call it a day.

Alex, Helen and I eventually got to bed at 4.30 and today I have no voice to speak of! Not sure how I am going to teach this week!

It had been a fantastic day of absolute mixed emotions. My most abiding memory, and the most important one, is that despite our sadness we left happy in the knowledge that we had given our boy the best send off we possibly could have, on behalf of all those who could not be there.

I am absolutely certain that just like us he will remember each and every one of those special moments for a long time to come.



*The handing over of the Coat...*

























**Thank you to Toni for her superbly written story of the day. It summed up everyone's thoughts and feelings perfectly, and to the following people for letting me use their photos: Donna, Sunny-mead, Hlostar, Val (Another One), Alex, Karen Ward, Mackers, Andie aka Petrus, Vet, Judith P, Sarah G, Brenda, Punkinpuss and me! (Kirsten)**