

Review:

The Imagine Festival

This year The Imagine Arts Festival was blessed with fine weather and crisp sunshine that made walking about on their Arts Trail, where the work of over thirty artists were advertised. This was a bit hit and miss but making random choices is the fun of such events.

I set out to see the work I was not familiar with and hit upon the undergraduate photographic work of diver Jamie Malone at the Wander Inn. Very impressive as such work is not easy to pose or set up and the technical aspects of colour and composition were fine but needed a better quality of presentation and printing. Jamie was a find at this festival and the Wander Inn has excellent potential as a venue for multi-cultural, multi-media work.

Berna Lawton

At Geoff's Bar, the home of cool and goatcheese chic, Beheld had a theme of nudity. I was well impressed with Ger Kennedy's, cherry-popping LOVE LETTERS FROM THE TAXMAN; Ruth Ahern's SOW 1 (five bikinis) and a glorious Bucket-head. Ciaran Conneely had beautiful erotic photographs especially the nude study with a scarf hiding the face. Once again Berna Lawton impressed with UNEXPECTED and SYBARITE.

At Bodega I enjoyed Rosemary Dulcson's mixed media work. The LIVE ART experience was a hit and miss affair at Waterford Centre For Further Education and my thanks to Caretaker, Tom Barrett, for showing me around the place. I did like the idea that the public could meet artists in a studio setting and it was great to chat with Sharon McCarthy who explores the random flow and viscosity of paint and colour and the unique images this created. Gabriella Eviston is an abstract colourist who meditates as part of the process and it was great to watch her relax into her work as she paints repeating patterns of hearts and layers of colour and meaning.

There is a wonderful chance and serendipity about going on Arts Trails and at Live Art I met the vivacious Christine Shanahan who was painting long narrow canvases as a result of a journey across Australia from Perth to Sydney with her family. This led me to meet her partner Michael Shanahan, an artist who works in sound images and soundscapes. He works under the name Mixile and I caught part of his work at Greyfriars Gallery and this is the kind of multi-mixed media work that impresses and deserves a wider audience.

Theatre

The Theatre Royal contribution to the Festival was the visit of UK company, Love And Madness Ensemble, with a new look at Playboy Of The Western World and Henry V. A young and vibrant company, they chose to set Playboy in the sixties but neither set nor costume suggested that. Pegeen Mike was bare-footed in pedal-ushers and it took a long dark underlit time before this work ignited into passionate life. Good strong performances from Owyn Stephens, Gerard Canning and a stunning Lucia McAnespie.

Underlighting and lack of consistent costume to establish the period made it hard to get into the second night's Henry V but the vitality of the company and the brisk pace made the work a treat in a very cold theatre. Neil Sheppeck was a fine Henry and McAnespie shone out. Here's somebody invites the company back with their Frankenstein and Tempest.

Dance

Libby Seward has sown a wonderful dancing scene in Waterford and the Imagine Festival, with sponsors Parker Green International, provided one of the success stories of the event. The impact of Hip-Hop Dance was impressive and the > Verse And Verses show at the Forum was amazing. Direct from London, Urban Classicism, wowed an audience with the most difficult hip-hop and modern dance music that was electric, visually attractive and full of inventive routines and exciting young dancers. Their choreographer/director, Robert Hylton, lit a fire that will grow and grow and as a preamble to the show he selected about thirty teenagers who had attended some workshops and they strutted their stuff with amazing style and confidence.

We don't see enough dance in Waterford and this festival brought the best. Once again we had a welcome visit of Independent Ballet Wales, with an excellent Giselle, choreographer by Darius James. A bright setting made the most of the Theatre Royal's stage and Frank Alexander Hunt's lighting design added much to a classic ballet imaginatively interpreted by a young company who have high standards. An excellent recorded soundtrack set the tone for a great evening. The young dancer Christopher James came gloriously into his own as Albrecht and he held my attention all the time. He was ably assisted by Amy Doughty, Elizabeth Peck, Keir Briody, James Foster, Katherine Kingston, Claire Boyd and Paul Chantry.

This company have a wonderful Administrative Director, Yvonne Williams who bubbles with enthusiasm and it's no wonder to learn that she started out with a newspaper, The South Wales Argus. Independent Ballet Wales are an inspiration as to how to nourish and nurture young dancers into a professional career and they do the work with commitment and dedication.

The Imagine Festival operates on such a small budget but perhaps less is better and why oh why have so many events starting at eight o'clock.