

Between the Lines



Veronica and Paul Lyng who paid a visit to Greyfriars Gallery on Friday last for Culture Night.

Liam Murphy - Into The Woods

Stephen Sondheim's *Into The Woods* is a dense and difficult musical and the David Hennessy Musical and Dramatic Society dealt competently with these demands, despite a space-consuming set made up of stairs and platforms that occupied more than half the playing area. This was essentially a youth production and I think this young and dedicated cast were well-suited to the fairytale/folktale content of the drama. It was easier to believe that a young cast could become the characters and deal with the moralistic tones. But this was no fledgling company and the way the first act was laid out was a tribute to the fine and detailed work of David Hennessy (director) and David Hayes (musical director). Some say that this is a first act musical and that the second act is riddled with inconsistencies. However this company made sense of the darker and more cynical tones. Gone was the ersatz, happily-ever-after of the first section and there was possibly the best exploration of the second act that I have seen, where Jessica Hackett, Adam Phelan, Kerill Kelly, Megan DeCoursey, Sinead O'Donovan, David Power, Evan Croke, Conor Clancy, Holly Ryan and Kayleigh Quinlan rose to new heights of ability and interpretation.

Nathan Carey set the scene as the young Narrator and he was consistent throughout the long show. The long Prologue introduced (or they did so themselves) most of the characters. The Witch sent the infertile Baker into the woods to get a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn and a slipper as pure as gold, and this quest would help him father a child.

This exposition involved four European folktales, but Sondheim added an American folktale, known as *The Baker's Dozen* and the *Witch*, a story with a community moral that 'explains' the *No One Is Alone* song and the moralistic *Children Will Listen*. He also saw the *Wolf* as the *Kinderfresser* (child devourer) who swallowed *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Granny*.

Holly Ryan shone out as *Little Red Riding Hood* in a powerful mixture of innocence and minx and her *I Know Things Now* was mature and powerful. Ciara Giles gave another measured character performance as *Granny*. Jessica Hackett was so impressive as *Cinderella* and her *On The Steps Of The Palace* seemed new to me, such was her interpretation and vocal emphasis. Sinead O'Donovan brought such depth to the *Witch*. Her *Lament* was powerful and she excelled herself with a wonderful *Last Midnight*. Megan DeCoursey was so strong and so positive as the *Baker's Wife*; she knew *The Baker* (Adam Phelan) was weak-willed and she supported him in *It Takes Two*. Her *Moments In The Woods* was a highlight of this show, of many moments of theatre and musical magic. Evan Croke as *Wolf* and *Cinderella's Prince* was splendid and Conor Clancy delivered the goods as *Rapunzel's Prince*. Their duet, *Agony*, in both acts, was another top quality moment. Once again David Power as *Mysterious Man* impressed with excellent diction and character skills. He added much to his duet with *The Baker* in *No More*. Adam Phelan as the *Baker* was magnificent in the second act.

Having David Hayes and Shane Ffrench play keyboards on either side of the stage was a masterful touch. Other parts were played by Carrie Mullane, Katie King, Hayley O'Brien, Eilish McLaughlin, Chloe McGrath, Jack Casey and Aaron Mooney.

On the technical side, I was not impressed by the set or the too-often sickly, yellow lighting. Loved the costumes from Avril Musgrave and Elaine Tighe, and hair and make-up from Christine Hennessy and Rachael Cody. Jody Trehy's sound design and operation was wonderful.

In The Willows

The Waterford alt folk six-piece *In The Willows* returned to Garter Lane to launch a CD and increase their 'likes' on Facebook. It's not the applause anymore, or the standing ovation (which they got), but 'likes' on Facebook, which they asked the audience to provide. I did. This band exist somewhere in a genre of alternative folk, with shades of Radiohead and Loreena

McKennitt. Drifting over into Vocal New Age and 'mindfulness'.

A London 4-piece, Hawk, opened for them and they were pleasant and percussive with an interesting single- Hush. At times lead singer, Julie Hawk, was inaudible, as if levels are set for the main act by the headliner's sound techie. They too wanted Facebook 'likes' and never ripped into a tune that would suggest originality.

In The Willows have a lot of slow, moody stuff and rely too much on two vocalists, Dave Greene and Tara Heffernan. They have an excellent violinist/fiddler, Rowan Sherlock. Clever percussion from Niall McFeeley and John Madigan can delight on bouzouki. On the night they had an additional percussion player, which posed the question -why have a bass guitarist?

They opened with Wake Me and it was slow, moody stuff. Trying had some sub-Bee Gee tones and Time Of Year was on the money (let's not make the same mistakes again). A two-hander, London, was a work in progress (you told me you would write between the lines, between me and you).

Sirens was a winner with fiddle and a solid beat (you are the brightest star). I loved the fiddle and keyboards piano on It's Over and this has lots of possibilities. It was, for me, too late when they rocked with Rowing Boats, and Fallen Bird was an anti-climax of an encore.

Thirty

To celebrate thirty years as an Arts Centre, Garter Lane mounted a retrospective show, Thirty, featuring artists who had exhibited during those years. No one style, theme or statement emerged and, without disrespecting these artists, it was not how I remembered those years, or maybe it was my expectation that is at fault. But a Ben Hennessy-curated show in Greyfriars was more interesting and more exciting. Nothing excited me in these thirty offerings; perhaps the emphasis was on representing artists rather than innovation or challenge.

Ben Hennessy's White Fish from 1985 had nothing of the 'big' canvases and excitement he generated. I do accept that Anthony Costine's Self-Portrait as An Artist, from 1983 (the oldest image on show), has a challenging, tongue-in-cheek, aspect, but 19 of the exhibits are 21st century.

I liked John Hearne's Repair and Joe Hunt's Comeraghs (but his work in Greyfriars is so much better). I have become an admirer of Fergus Dillon and his Woodstown Evening is a joy to gladden the spirit with a sense of place. Perhaps it is that lack of a sense of place that is missing in this exhibition. Sean Corcoran seems poorly represented by Inside my Head, as is Pat Murphy's Self Portrait With Mickey and Minnie.

My top choice from this show is Michael Beirne's In A Bindu Garden, where there is a world of little touches and richness of detail.

Martin Fahy

In the entrance (FOH Space), a young art-maker, Martin Fahy, excited me, with a freshness, as he explores aspects of the Circle, the Orb, the Disc, from atom to celestial bodies. His title, 28, gives the impression of being short of 30. Fahy's work attracts me and the work he does in the small Southpaw Studio in William Street encourages a new generation of art and image makers. Waterford Council gave him the space to 'breathe', as it were and he has repaid in abundance this faith which Arts Officer Conor Nolan placed on him.

Fahy's mantra is "The main focus of my work is to use everyday objects and materials to create art pieces in an attempt to prove that art can be made with little effort and cost. To promote the notion that anyone can be creative, given the opportunity, I aim to make the creative process accessible to all".

This reminded me of the aims of Waterford Arts for All Project, who campaigned successfully to create such a space as Garter Lane.

Thirty runs until 1st November.

A Streetcar Named Desire

As part of the NTLive stage to screen presentations, the Young Vic production of Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire was such a visceral production. Modernised by director Benedict Andrews, gone was the dark, brooding, Edgar Allen Poe 'tagged' setting. In its place was a steel and white open plan stage that revolved 360 degrees to create a more intimate event, as theatre in the round. This heightened the brutality and raw power of Stanley Kowalski, who strutted in sweaty vests and combat trousers. His love-making was intimate and intense, as were his rages that had the lost or spoiled child sense of impotency. Ben Foster was as imposing as his tattooed torso, as Stanley. Vanessa Kirby was a confusion of love and attraction, as Stella, torn between a 'mad' sister with a trunk full of past dreams and fictions, and a passionate and jealously protective husband.

Gillian Anderson was superb as Blanche, her older sister, who was 'running on dry' and remembering a faded gentility that may never have been, as she described it. This was delusional memory and fantasy on a grand scale. Anderson had the audience caught in a web of fascination and sympathy. At times, you were annoyed at her and repulsed by her as she flirted cruelly with a young man, or when she lured a decent-sort in Mitch, who took care of an ill mother. Then you felt angry at Stanley's brutal rape of her and the hatred of that scene. But, by the end, as she was taken away by a doctor and nurse in a slow-motion ritual, as she was linked arm-in-arm by the doctor, you feel such sympathy, as she stared at the heavens over her Moon Lake Casino. Here was a performance that plunged you into sadness beyond fragility.