

Pheasantry October, 2017

by Jane W

There always seems some worry to niggle me in the run up to a Lee concert: nasty weather, a planned rail strike, Lee being ill... this month was no exception. I was poorly.

Without going into too much detail, (I really don't want to put you off your tea and custard creams [or whatever you are enjoying while reading this report] with my gross-out symptoms) on the Sunday before I thought I had pneumonia.

By Tuesday I realised I would live, and by Thursday I'd recovered enough to go into work. Friday morning I reckoned I could probably sit for a couple of hours without making disgusting noises, so decided that I could go to the concert.

I apologise now to all those in close proximity to me for making that decision.

I did have a dry run on Saturday. I went to London with some friends to see 'The Play that Goes Wrong' and managed to sit right through with just the occasional ladylike clearing of the throat to irritate my companions. OK, so the serious hacking fit in the curry house that evening was troubling, but I put that down to overly-potent lime pickle rather than lurgy.

After a good night's sleep I was feeling almost well again. Sunday morning I set off on my much shortened journey to London with a spring in my step, and a shedload of tissues in my handbag (just in case).

Odd to arrive so early at the Travel Lodge, well before booking in time. Never mind. The staff supplied me with tea, and I contentedly settled into a comfy seat in the bright autumnal sun, checking my

social media and watching the world (for ‘world’ read staff and residents) go by.

My friends texted or tweeted, and before long we’d all gathered together to figure out the best route to the Pheasantry, given that Sloane Square was shut in one direction.

Piccadilly Line – South Kensington – walk to Pheasantry – easy. Chatting with the gang, and admiring the doubtless jaw-droppingly expensive terraces (OK ‘town houses’ if you like. But I’m a northerner; they looked like terraces to me. I’ll give you POSH terraces) we arrived at our destination just as dusk fell.

Inside for our dinner this time, and with a little furniture arranging we managed to get the whole crowd, including those friends we met at the Pheasantry itself, onto one table. Perfect. Well nearly perfect. My dear friend Julie (Who Blooming Well Is a Fan) had to drop out at the last minute. I thought of her in particular as we raised our glasses to absent friends (If you are reading this Julie, you were very much missed. Hugs x), though I wasn’t the only fan there to be missing a good friend. ☹

On the upside two of our lovely Stage Loppies that I hadn’t expected to see were there ☺. That just goes to show how much out-of-the-loop I have got what with one thing and another. Good to have such a delightful surprise.

Lee fans had pretty much taken over the ground floor of the restaurant, but of course as 6pm approached most left their tables to wait on the stairs for the doors to open. Shame really, seeing as the little jazz club didn’t open till 6.30pm. Still seeing the smiling faces and hearing the chatter, I get the impression that many enjoyed this brief reminder of the once epic three hour queue of yore.

I stayed behind, one of three from our table left to figure out the bill. We were rewarded with a very brief glimpse of Lee as he headed to his dressing room. The Meadster is in the building!

Table allocation can be a bit of a lottery sometimes. The seating-by-order-of-booking idea generally works well, but of course you can never be certain which table you'll get, even if you know you've booked quite early.

So on entering, I was surprised but delighted to see my friend waving to me from our favourite table. Ooo my favourite seat! Happy Jane. And adding to my pleasure the two unexpected Stage Loppies joined us. So more great company which also prevented a Julie-shaped hole all through the evening.

Just next to me another lovely couple were seated: two staunch fans that somehow I'd not met before. (If you are reading this it was really nice chatting to you both!). And opposite, Lee's family's table. I could tell this would be quite a night.

Large glass of water to hand; pack of tissues on the table. Right! I'm ready to deal with that pesky cough, should it return. All I need now is my dose of Mead.

And here he comes! Ooo in his Some Enchanted Evening three piece suit. Ding Dong!

My, how cool and confident he looked – as well as gorgeous, but that goes without saying.

“You're my everything...” And sat in my favourite seat staring up at that handsome face, listening to that beautiful voice, the world melted away. Ahhhh!

I've noted before that Lee tends to be at his giddiest on days when his voice isn't quite its normal strength. That night he was on top form vocally, so I was expected a more restrained set of links.

Nope. Not a bit of it. Mr Mead was ‘in excellent fooling’ (ooo I’m quoting Shakespeare. Why did that happen?) for instance... no. I’m going to try to put it all in context. Let me see.

His first link started with a welcome but quickly segued on to Holby City and Lofty’s relationship with Dom. No hints about how their love affair will pan out (shucks), but he did mention that he’s not been working full weeks lately. (I am emotionally preparing myself for a Lofty drought).

After singing ‘Grow Old With Me’ he started his familiar tale of Jodie, his first love who cruelly deserted him for a 17 year old with a car. A cherry red, Fiat – something or other (I’m a non-driver. I remembered “cherry red”. That’s as good as it gets).

“And NOW,” Lee cried “I drive an AUDI!! A top of the range one!!”

A heckler from the audience:

“And we know what they say about men who drive big cars Lee!” Hang on – I know that voice. Welcome back to the Pheasantry, Mr Rahman-Hughes.

“Yes,” Lee replied “They’re big in other ways too. Now you drive a little car AND it’s not very fast... Good grief! I’ve turned into Julian Clary in pantomime.” Oh yes you have Lee!

Back to more serious matters – ‘Maria’. Again the usual explanation about being a second tenor and therefore having difficulty with the big note in the middle of the song. Every time I have heard him sing it, he’s never faltered. Yet every time I listen with hands pressed to my mouth as Lee ramps up, takes a deep breath and pushes that wonderful note out from his lungs. What differed about Sunday night’s performance was it all seemed so effortless. No ramping up, no audible breath – he just let that big note materialise, strong and pure, from nowhere. Doesn’t that show his confidence?

On to the guest spot, brought forward on this occasion so that 'Maria' could be followed by a companion piece, 'Something's Coming', courtesy of Stephen Rahman-Hughes. The band struck up...AARRGGHH It's no good! Johndeep's interpretation from 'Any Dream Will Do', jolted into my head. I could almost visualise him stood on the stage. It took an effort to concentrate on SRH. Back in the room, Jane – this is too good to miss. And I am pleased to say that once I did start concentrating (not that easy when I know Lee's stood not far behind me) I warmed to that song. Thank you, Stephen.

One number, and Lee returned to the stage and...started beating SRH up! Which was – I was going to say "a bit uncalled for" but it was so funny, I'll be calling for it again.

From Maria to Wham. With Mrs Mead in the audience I expected his intro to be somewhat curtailed, as on other occasions. Nope. Not a bit of it. In fact he treated us to an extended "mum hovering" impression, which brought lots of laughter from the table opposite me.

Then, making as much room as possible on the tiny dais, Lee threw himself into the comedy dancing with the sort of gusto that wouldn't have been out of place on a big stage.

Rather a sweet moment. One of the waiting staff is involved in... a musical I think. Sorry too much of my brain power is needed for memorising Lee, so I've forgotten exactly what she was involved in, but anyway Lee got her up on stage to plug the show. Awww!

And a bigger Awww!! Lee mentioned his girlfriend on a couple of occasions in his lead into songs. It's wonderful to see him looking so happy when he speaks about her 😊.

Other than the inclusion of his guest, and extra funny links, the first set ran as pretty much as always.

Just to note a few highlights: I always love ‘All of Me’, but on this occasion it felt like he was singing directly to me; sing-a-long-a ‘Back for Good’; another exquisite rendition of ‘Blackbird’ (how I congratulated myself for not coughing during that one.

The first half ended with ‘Close Every Door’ (cue memories of the loincloth, which is not, Lee told us making an appearance in next year’s tour. Damn!) and once again the roar of applause filled the little venue, as his last note boomed through the room.

I could not fault a moment.

The second half brought a costume change. He changed his tie. So he says. I didn’t notice a difference. He did have to divest himself of his jacket though. I was impressed that he managed to wear it for as long as he did, given how hot the Pheasantry gets.

Though he mentioned the warmth and drank some water in the second half, it didn’t seem to be troubling him as much as it had in September. That said, at one point he did take a short break to rest from singing.

“Right. Let’s have a Q&A,” he said “anyone got any questions?”

Expectant pause.

“Anyone.”

A familiar voice from the Northern Ladies’ table:

“It’s all right. You just sit there and we’ll look at you.”

Lee burst in to fits of giggles, and the whole room laughed along, many of us no doubt thinking exactly the same as my Northern Lady friend.

Then a man’s voice:

“What happened to the pigeon on your balcony?”

“My pigeon? Gosh you read my tweets?!” (Oh Lee, if you only knew how avidly we read them.) He explained how he found the nest empty of all but some broken egg shells, which he hopes means that all the chicks hatched and flew away. He flapped his arms to emphasise the point.

“Any more questions?”

A friend of mine in the front row asked something sensible about his song choices for the next album.

He didn't give many clues, other than wanting to represent what he's been singing over the last 10 years.

“It's hard to remember though. There's been such a lot.”

“I have a spreadsheet,” said my friend and again the Meadster giggled. We're an organised bunch!

With no more questions coming Lee started to sing again.

I can't remember what. I'm rather fuzzy about the second half, but and as far as I can remember his voice was as strong and rich as ever after his rest.

Mind you I confess to being a bit distracted at times, because Mr Cough had come a-visiting. I spent much of the time when I ought to be applauding ducking behind a pillar with a tissue in hand trying not to interrupt any actual singing.

I managed rather well I thought. On the whole I don't think I disturbed any too much.

There was just one occasion when I did have some serious difficulty. Wanna guess which song he was singing? Go on guess. I'll give you a clue. What do you think would be THE WORST time to get a coughing fit during a Lee concert?

Yep that's the one. Hushaby blooming Mountain.

I felt the tickle just at the end of the instrumental. OK. Water. That didn't work. More water. I swallowed hard.

“So close your eyes...”

The need-to-cough sensation ramped up. I needed more water but daren't reach out for the jug. Strange little strangled hiccup noises started emanating from my mouth.

“Say goodbye to cares...”

I clasped my throat. My friend, seeing my distress, caringly...had a good laugh. Then poured out more water for me.

“And watch the boats...”

I reached for the glass, drank. Spluttered, squeaked.

“Sail far away...”

Arrgghh!! I'm going to explode! (Friend by now is struggling as much as I am but with silent fits of giggles.)

“...from lullaby...”

Please don't hold the last note long Lee – PPPLLEEAAASSEE.
(Splutter, splutter, squeak, squeak)

“...b-a-a-a-a-a a-a-a-a-a-----y.”

And I practically fell off my chair, with the relief of finally being able to get it all out of my system.

Phew!

‘Why God Why’ came next. I remember that as I was still conscious of the cough. It sounded pretty damn fine to me, though Lee apologised at the end for not supporting the last note enough. That guy is so humble.

Stephen returned to the stage following Lee's stunning performance of 'Feeling Good'. I'm pretty sure about this because Stephen complimented Lee on his performance, as he walked off stage. I said something complimentary myself – along the lines of “Bloody brilliant” and jumped as Lee said “Thank you very much” from just behind me.

Of course he might have been thanking Stephen, but I like to think he heard me.

Stephen introduced his second number by talking about Peter Gabriel, a performer he has only recently taken to. (He's where I feel old. Peter Gabriel is a major part of the soundtrack of life.)

What's he going to sing? 'Shaking the Tree' would fit Stephen's usual style. Maybe 'Sledge Hammer' – but I was quietly hoping for 'Salisbury Hill'.

“I'd like your help with this song. When I sing 'my heart going...’”

Ooo it is 'Salisbury Hill'.

“Boom, boom, boom!” I sang out joyfully. Then I realised I was the only person in the room who had sung. Oops.

Stephen didn't seem to mind. Actually he looked quite pleased.

“That's right!” he said. Then got the rest of the audience to practice “boom, boom, booming” and clapping in time.

Ah – I enjoyed that song so much. Thank you Stephen.

OK what else...ooo gosh yes. The handbag moment. That caused some hilarity.

The one song from the 'Some Enchanted Evening' album which Lee always includes is 'Ain't That a Kick in the Head'. He doesn't exactly dance through it, but he does move around the stage a lot. This time

he came to take his mike of the stand, only to discover that the lead had got trapped under one of the front tables.

So there's the star of the show, crawling round on the floor.

“Errm excuse me. Could you move your handbag. It's on the lead.”

It would have helped if he's identified the right owner. Talk about causing confusion! Bless him!

“Tell you what, I'll just sing it from here,” he said kneeling in front of his fans.

But by this time the correct handbag had been identified, and moved, freeing the lead and Mr Mead to continue the song as intended.

So onto the final part of the show. Blessedly I'd stopped coughing by this point so I could listen to 'Fix You' and 'Lullabye' without embarrassment.

And of course I am never embarrassed to sing along to 'Any Dream Will Do' though my voice is not in the same league as my friend sat opposite me. That woman can 'aha-ah' for England.

The show finished.

The usual farewells were more curtailed in some cases because of the later start. I wasn't in any particular hurry though, and hung about chatting to those that remained, naturally hoping to get a few words with Lee.

It wasn't to be that night. I did manage to have a little chat with our favourite violinist, and with Stephen. I thanked Stephen for his performing one of my favourite songs, explained that it was me who sang the “boom boom boom” bit first, hoped to hear it again.

He was, as always, very sweet, and said everything you might expect of a performer being complimented over enthusiastically, but he did look at me in a puzzled way.

After he left I turned to the friend standing with me.

“I called it ‘Silsbury Hill’ all the way through that conversation, didn’t I?”

“Yep.”

“Doh!”

By this point Lee had returned to the room, joined his family and was tucking into a pizza. I tried not to watch him as he ate (being a medieval reenactor I’ve had to endure the feeding –in-public thing all too often) but he does tend to draw the eye.

Instead, I concentrated on boring my friend silly with the descriptions of my new house, while waiting for the others to gather.

“Excuse me,” I turned to find our waiter had approached. “There’s a bag been left under your table.”

Quick check of my shoulder. No not mine. I went with him.

Indeed, under the table was what seemed to be an overnight bag. Odd considering none of the others were staying over in London. The waiter picked it up. It sort of unfolded until I could plainly see...

“Err that’s a suit bag!” I said.

“Excuse me!” a very attractive, young blonde lady came to the rescue. “That’s Lee’s.”

“I can take it if he doesn’t want it!” I joked, and the lady laughed (which was very sweet of her because it was a pretty naff joke).

Eventually our little gang drew together. As we left we called out our thanks to Lee who, graciously smiled and nodded.

I was the last to leave.

“Thank you Lee!” I called as I walked away.

And promptly tripped over my trailing scarf.

Oh well. With luck he might have thought I was doing a homage to Lofty.

Best exit. Stage left.