

# CATHEDRAL QUARTER FESTIVAL

## Festival lift-off

Two of the more important events of the Festival were the Beckett solo plays. Conor Lovett performed *Molloy* (first Friday) and *Malone Dies* (first Saturday) in the upper reaches of Direct Wine Shipments. Note: Good wine, shame about the lack of disabled access.

Lovett has rightly been lauded for these performances elsewhere. He made the material accessible and animate. The animation is a difficult negotiation, as the Wrinkly one ever lit his drama dark. The freshness and economic verve of the language made it shine like pins. Humour, terse as it is, does find a voice in both works. It breathes in the timing, which was on Lovett's part acute. This of course was married to acerbic observation and set against the face of the same void as one finds in *Endgame* and *Godot*. On both nights the pathos rang true, and repeat ovations were rightly given.

A screening of *The Phantom of the Opera* in St. Anne's (second Monday) was one of the most original concepts of the Festival. The sellout audience was (necessarily) set *volte face* the altar and the inelegant bar heaters of the Cathedral walls were still lit from without by a bright evening until a late sunset; but it did not hamper the enjoyment overmuch. The film is high camp in capes (like most early horrorfilms). Lon Chaney, as the Phantom, bestrode the shadows like a catarrhine snout and forehead atop terrifyingly stilted Cuban heels. The very face of frightfulness. The supporting cast did their upmost to maintain their composure.

The live organ was superb. It managed to pinion the staccato rhythm of the set pieces and supplement the mesmeric effect of the film's opacous lighting. The Golden Ear of Wheat went to the actor playing the Comte de Chegney. His gesticulations

could land a spyplane.

Or could have. The film is nearly eighty years worn, but still remarkably loopy. In particular, the makeup for Chaney still affects. The mask of the Phantom looks like a thin sleeve of pigskin draped over, and dabbed by, the cephalopod tongue of a wet mouth. He has fossorial claws. He plays the organ in moments of fugue. He laughs as if he is about to juggle innards. No similarities with Jools Holland.

As with the beatific performances of *The Sixteen* in the Belfast Festival at Queen's Festival last year, the Cathedral showed itself a good performance space. As is the Catalyst Arts. Avant-garde rock group Die Kunst (first Saturday) were apparently gasping for a drink. They performed approx. fifteen 90 second songs, admittedly of high quality, and then spent all night in the Press Bar 'installation club' dancing to fresh eighties beats. The old man barstaff were rightly appalled. Memory Cells and Avanto (second Friday) provided ascetic monotone and pleasant cerebration in an "I take drugs" jacket.

Cathy Surgeoner (one half of Loop) astutely chose the Lagan Lookout (second Wednesday-Friday) for an intriguing video installation piece of urban night. The show consisted of a triptych projection of cycloid Sony 8 footage with hypnagogic audio. It evoked the monolithic detachment of night cities, as Lynch explored so well in *Eraserhead*. Surgeoner offers no explicit meaning to the work. And wisely so, as it exists something beyond focus; much as many experience the illumined bypass of early morning. The coarse surfaced walls and etiolated vaults in the Lookout mark it as a unique space yet under-used. Tension in the piece was undoubtedly augmented by the locus. Such shows as these should happen more often.

CIAN O'NEILL praises the diversity and excitement of the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, while overleaf, NAOMI FOYLE predicts a bright future for Belfast



Man in a box—Maynard Flip Flap takes to the streets

Will Self gave good giant head to an enthused John Hewitt crowd (second Thursday) who braved the alarmingly fair weather to get there. By way of introduction he assured everyone that they were naked under their clothes while he was not. The gathered were thankful. A subsequent offer by Self to read a tale of death was met with the clamorous approbation one normally associates with offers of cake. Opting like the kind aunt he is for one of adultery, he then delivered a good reading.

For good see richly emphatic, voluble and sickly hilarious. Self is the evident heir to the Interzone of satire mapped out by Burroughs. Foremost is his linguistic command. Language is colleted for the beryl and jade of his logical outrages. He astonishes with assomance and makes especial use of mundane description to counterpose the hyperreality of his prose. In this piece,

that meant that the Volvo Turbo Instruction Manual (model forgotten) featured prominently. This he quoted with 'a' Swedish accent and juxtaposed with a smorgasbord of deft obscenity; talking of Priapic display and female anatomy in terms that would frighten Toyah Wilcox to death. If she could leave her mons alone for long enough to understand.

Apparently Self's parents were nudists. This perhaps explains his strong moral voice. For as much as he is lateral he takes care to expose the minutiae of London life, and how morally spastic its myrmidon residents are (opine his). The cartographic placement of characters is an obvious method which works well for him, because of this play with the intellectual bird feed of much interior monologue-

quotidian habits, city centre parking. In this sense he matches Easton Ellis and the cosmetology of *American Psycho*. Whether termed misanthrope or Damocles, he was mightily impressive.

Said assessment being sadly not applicable to Tom Paulin (second Friday), whose projection struggled to o'ertop the decayed piped ambience of the McCausland Hotel. Less Damocles, more Canute. Whilst he writes professionally, he does not read as well. Though he was playing with a stacked deck, for the McCausland seemed stuffed to the rafters with conversation anaesthetists and bilious recusants who were happy to listen to either / too pissed on gin to care. A reading of a section of his 'Wind-Dog' radio poem worked very well however, as he caught his gait on the alliteration and fricatives (beloved of Paulin, apparently). Heedless queries about milkman's squash and whether Greer or Parsons, of the old Late Review lineout, were onanist by nature or merely fake and should have been asked in the bar, if at all.

Paulin made better sense in the Masterclass of Saturday morning (Antrim Room), where despite worse acoustics he could properly expound. A closely attentive group of various ages listened more and spoke less. Speaking on Literary theory extensively, he discussed the drafting process of a recent poem on conspiracy theory relating to the Duke of Kent. An odd choice, but what it revealed of his thinking made a success of the format.

Paulin posited critical writing as foremost in the written arts, referencing Wilde's famous paradigm of 'critic as artist'. This is understandable given his academic day job. Yet it is a difficult proposition to accept as other than self-serving. He seems more comfortable as critic than writer.

Second run, and already coherent, it is a happy thought that the festival will recur. Would that it were remountant. ♦

## Bright future

**As the self-declared Official Tarot Card Reader for the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival, I must confess I was a bit of a late blow in.** Turf was kept me in Brighton for the bank holiday weekend—mobile mysticism can be a cut-throat scene. However I hope I made up for my late arrival by snagging a prime publicity opp my first day in the City. No sooner had I set up my trusty Tarot Table in front of City hall than I was besieged by the local paparazzi. OK, well, actually I was somewhat abashedly approached by a lone, prowling photographer from the *Belfast Telegraph* who confessed he hates bothering people for a shot, and together we devised a good pose for his assignment; to cover the sudden spring heat wave. The next day there I was, beaming away on the front page of the *Tele*, predicting sun for the weekend and plugging the Festival as well. It was a great welcome back to a city I last visited seven years ago, but also a wee bit nerve-racking. Had it rained my Belfast career would have dropped dead in the puddles, but

happily the Festival ended in a blaze of glory, with fantastic weather, good ticket sales and overall, excellent reviews. Festival Director Sean Kelly was a happy man.

He had much to be proud of. The line-up was a great mix of local and international talent. Had I arrived on May 3rd I surely would have attended such stellar events as a reading by Louis De Bernieres; 'Sealboy: Freak Show', a one man show by Mat Fraser; a production of *Malone Dies* by Gare St. Lazare Players; and a performance by avant punk krautrockers Die Kunst. As it was, I thoroughly enjoyed the select events I was able to attend. I sampled traditional Irish music in a viewing of Sinead O'Brien's documentary 'Luke', marvelling at the integrity and charisma of the late Dubliners' singer, and later stretched my own poor vocal cords to the limit in an unaccompanied singing workshop with the gifted and dedicated Roisin White. On the literary front I was too late for a ticket to Will Self and

Fortune smiled on the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival reports  
NAOMI FOYLE