

## Dancehalls Dresses & Drama

A Fantastic trip back down memory lane, staged by one local company, has scored another success in a growing body of work which is certainly packing 'em in.

'Dance Halls, Dresses and Drama', an evening of entertainment evoking the sights, sounds and everyday life of 1950s Larne, achieved the seemingly impossible last Friday night (30th October).

It seemed that the Purple Events Company's previous production in the McNeill Theatre, 'Soldiers, Supper & Swing', could not be topped.

That recreation of local life during the two world wars was a theatrical triumph and one fondly remembered by all present in July's full house.

Using music, dance, poetry, storytelling, props, and costumes, and featuring a wide variety of talented local performers, it had taken everyone present right back and immersed them all in the tragedy and tumult, as well as the humour and hope, of those years.

However, 'Dance Halls, Dresses and Drama' turned out to be that rarest of all beasts: the successful sequel that, if anything, even manages to outdo its prestigious predecessor in some respects.

Like the previous production, it not only attracted a full house but one of all ages, testimony to the broad appeal which this magnificent and innovative multi-media approach can conjure up.

And, as with the First and Second World War, the fabulous Fifties provided the organisers with plenty of contemporary material which they fitted into the show with style and skill.

The result, as with 'Soldiers, Supper & Swing', was a fitting tribute to a vanished age and one which really got the audience going on a number of a levels.

As we have said, this crowd comprised a good cross-section of the population, so there were many present who could remember the '50s and were not disappointed by this remarkable, rousing recreation. Those unfamiliar with the decade at first hand were equally enthralled.

Many of those who had taken the stage in July were back again, meaning the show was in capable hands and that the new elements, added to and enhancing the established mix, would work well.

Music was, of course, a big part

Music was, of course, a big part of the wartime-themed production and, as we moved on to the birth of rock 'n' roll, a wealth of new tunes were embraced with enthusiasm and communicated with consummate ability.

Amongst the Fifties artistes who work was remembered and celebrated at Friday evening's show were, of course, Ruby Murray, Bobby Darin, Cliff Richard, Perry Como and Cliff Richard.

There was everything from the 'Anniversary Waltz' to 'At Last', 'Magic Moments' to 'Mr Sandman', 'Sugartime' to 'Que Sera Sera.'

Performing these nostalgic numbers were those stalwarts of 'Soldiers, Supper & Swing' ALS Band and marvellous singer Zolene Mayberry, bringing this musical Golden Age glowingly, gloriously back to life.

The audience obviously couldn't get enough of it as hit after hit was belted out with all the power and perfection we have come to expect from these performers.

There was no doubting the fact that their renditions formed highpoints in a show which was as chock full of such musical highs as a genuine Fifties dance hall. Indeed, it was a wonder dancing didn't break out all over the McNeill!

Also taking the stage this time round were members of Larne Drama Circle who staged a scene,

interspersed with and incorporating the numbers, portraying life in a working class family from the '50s. As with all LDC productions, quality was assured and the scene helped to convey a real flavour of the town during a decade rich in drama. The players brilliantly managed to capture the atmosphere of post-war life in a humorous and heartfelt way, rekindling yet more magical memories.

Larne Historical Society's Liam Kelly had made a notable contribution to 'Soldiers, Supper & Swing' with his tales of the war years. He made a welcome return for 'Dance Halls, Dresses and Drama', carrying the story of Larne on into the next decade.

Once again, Liam's expertise and love of his subject was conveyed to the audience, combining profound learning and ably complementing the other parts of the show.

Generously provided by the Larne public, stories, photographs and a video show of local life in the 1950s really captured the imagination and assisted this superb stroll down memory lane. The interactive nature of this section of the show also added to the enjoyment of the whole experience.

Stir some long-forgotten feelings

Did you spot a pal at the Pavilion? Was it you yourself taking the floor? Did these scenes from Larne's streets of half a century and more ago stir some long-forgotten feelings or thoughts about an episode or feature, maybe long since vanished, from the Fifties?

Undoubtedly, the Purple Events Company's approach to recreating the past in an entertaining way does all the above and then some!

Nor did this outstanding achievement end there.

As with the previous show, the use of costumes, props, sound effects and stage sets more than succeeded in pulling off that rarest of tricks, making the past live again in an entertaining and informative way.

From the smallest details to the biggest of big pictures, the moment folk entered the theatre they stepped straight into that tremendous time machine.

Praise must be given to the performers and organisers who put heart and soul into the era of rock 'n' roll.

The Purple Events Company's Irene McGookin, along with the stars of her show, received a more than well-deserved ovation when she took the stage, paying equally generous tribute to all those who had helped with everything from props to costumes, pictures to cherished memories.

It gives some idea of the scale of such a show and the effort which goes into making it a reality, revealing once more the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication, to say nothing of talent, in a production like this.

One of the aims of 'Dance Halls, Dresses and Drama' was, fittingly for a Fifties show, to 'raise the spirits of the nation, similar to the Festival of Britain in 1951!'

All those involved can rest assured that they did this and more, as the happy audience would undoubtedly agree.

Now, the question is, where to next for this exceptional company?

With another show promised for December, we look forward to seeing it back on stage in a further production of this calibre.

The show, to be held on 10th December, will be 'Dance Halls, Dresses and Drama' with a Christmas twist.

Rock on!