

Lorraine Brunning Sings Piaf

When Lorraine Brunning steps out from behind the navy blue shimmering curtains into the lonely spotlight, it is at first difficult to imagine how this small, pleasant-faced performer could ever evoke the passion and tragedy of the legendary Edith Piaf.

The doubt was deleted from my mind as soon as the first note was sung. Her voice sent tingles down the spine and if you closed your eyes you would have thought that Piaf was alive and well and performing her hits at the Jermyn Street Theatre.

Love always featured prominently in Piaf's songs. She had many lovers in her lifetime and was deemed an incurable romantic. Lorraine Brunning shows the vulnerable side of Piaf with the rendition of *Hymne a L'Amour* dedicated to a lover who was killed in a plane crash.

Prostitutes were always another favourite subject and the song *L'Accordioniste*, about a prostitute pining for her missing accordion player boyfriend, saw Ms Brunning poignantly searching for the strains of the instrument in the imaginary back streets of Paris. Using a green chair as solitary prop, with accompaniment on piano by the Musical Director, Barrie Bignold, hits such as *La Vie En Rose*, *Mon Dieu*

and a memorable *Autumn Leaves*, the song which she wrote for actor Yves Montand, and the grand finale to the show *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien* were delivered impeccably. Lorraine Brunning took over the role in Sir Peter Hall's acclaimed West End production and was given rave reviews. It is easy to see why, as all emotions are stirred as a result of her stunning voice. One of Piaf's ex-lovers, a professional cyclist, once compared spending two hours in the company of Piaf to cycling the whole of the Tour de France, such was her dramatic nature.

Not only are you treated to some beautiful songs but, in between, Brunning relays anecdotes about Piaf's life leading up to her death in October, 1963. This is really a refreshing approach as you come away with a clearer picture of this enigma and what motivated her as a performer. A breathtaking performance and my only wish was that it could have lasted longer than its one hour 15 minutes. □



JULIE EAGLETON AT
THE JERMYN STREET THEATRE

What originally started off as a four minute dance piece devised especially for the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest, *Riverdance The Show* has now returned for its second sell-out run here. Since that memorable night in Dublin two years ago the show has gone on to break all records. It took New York by storm on St Patrick's week, when over 50,000 people saw the show at Radio City Music Hall. The Belfast run of *Riverdance* has broken all records to become the biggest entertainment event in Northern Ireland and the video has now been confirmed the best selling music video of all time. So how can such a show continue to live up to its expectations and not become boring and repetitive? Continuing change and innovation seems to be the answer.

Since male principal dancer Michael Flatley's controversial departure last year from the show, producer Moya Doherty hasn't rested on her laurels. The statuesque but graceful Jean Butler still keeps her role as principal female dancer and newcomer Colin Dunne, a nine time world dancing champion, has the difficult task of stepping into Flatley's shoes. He pulls it off with great aplomb and spins his way across the stage at the speed of lightning. The two dancers maintain an electric chemistry throughout and sustain the energy and passion needed to front a show of this nature. The dancers practice for four hours every day and it shows. Not a missed beat or step, and at one

point there are 70 dancers on the stage together – the sound of their feet hitting the wooden stage in unison is quite magical.

Composer Bill Whelan combines traditional Irish music with Eastern European and world music influences. The singing group Anuna supply the haunting vocals and harmonies and the Riverdance Orchestra boasts many musical stars in their own right including Eileen Ivers, a seven times All-Ireland fiddle champion.

You would be mistaken to think that the show concentrates predominately on the Irish culture. Renowned experimental flamenco dancer Maria Pages brings some hot, Spanish blood to proceedings and her duet flamenco/Riverdance style with Colin Dunne is something to remember. The Moscow Folk Ballet Company astound with their colourful acrobatic fusion of Bolshoi Ballet combined with a variety of folk dances which nearly bring the house down. There are Harlem shoe shuffles backed by images of the Brooklyn Bridge alongside Irish folk dances in front of rolling green fields.

Riverdance is a celebration of Irish culture, but most importantly it is a celebration of dance, from all creeds and cultures, and this is dance of the very highest standard and discipline that you're ever likely to see. □

JULIE EAGLETON AT LABATTS APOLLO

RIVERDANCE