

ONCE

Between the Bars at the ADC Theatre

Once is a musical based on the 2007 film of the same name by John Carney. Like the film, music and lyrics were by Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová, including the Academy Award-winning "Falling Slowly". The book for the musical was written by Enda Walsh and is the winner of eight Tony Awards.

Once tells the story of a Guy (jilted Dublin busker/vacuum cleaner repairman) and a Girl (an immigrant Czech odd-jobs worker and musician) who meet on a Dublin street. He's busking his last set before he gives up on music forever. She needs her vacuum cleaner fixed. Through music, a delicate, hopeful connection is forged. Over the course of one fateful week, an unexpected friendship quickly evolves into a powerful but complicated love story.

It is rare for an audience to be clapping and singing along even before curtain up but that is what happened at the ADC Theatre the first week of April. The audience really appreciated the energy created by the ensemble with the busking session at the start of the show which would have graced any Irish bar. *Once* enjoyed a very successful run in London but this was my first taste of this musical. It doesn't have big chorus numbers and belting ballads but it is lively and fun, full of good music and powerful emotion.

It is difficult to write a review when there is little to criticise about a production. Both Director and MD had put their 14-strong cast through their paces in exhilarating fashion. The staging was excellent and Director Cat Nicol kept the movement flowing smoothly. Musical Director James Harvey did a sterling job with the music particularly with the ensemble and one could not deny the sheer amount of talent they have collectively. The ensemble plus instruments sitting either side of the stage could have caused problems but did not as the set design had various levels which were well used. Lighting too was very good and the display with reverse translation quite ingenious.

The actors, who all played instruments, managed to switch from playing and singing into acting well, making the most of the many humorous lines. Good supporting performances particularly from Warren Clark as Billy the music shop owner, James Hayward as the Bank Manager, Richard Scarr as Da and Fran Watson who, as Baruska, appeared to relish relating her terrifying Czech tales.

Danielle Padley (Girl) and Andrew Ruddick (Guy) were nothing short of brilliant. Both skilful vocally and instrumentally and no slouches in the acting arena either. The emotion they created was palpable, their parting being particularly emotive.

There were certainly moments that sparkled: the Ensemble cast coming together in a sumptuous vocal blend in beautiful numbers like 'Gold' and at the heart of it was 'Falling Slowly', a duet between the two musicians. Beautiful.

Once is one of those shows which gives you much to think about and it is actually quite hard to describe the feelings it leaves you with. It doesn't have too many well-known songs but this excellent production will certainly stick long in the memory. Many congratulations to all involved.

Julie Petrucci
Editor *Combinations*