

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 – Simon Callow in De Profundis*****

Playing to the lunchtime crowd is probably not the easiest of gigs, but from the off Simon Callow has not given himself an easy task.

The show is Callow on stage alone, talking almost every one of the ninety minutes, without a break. He takes us from the prison cell where he is writing from, on a journey of love, desire, disenchantment and disillusionment.



Simon Callow in George Street just after a performance

Ninety minutes of listening to one voice could be tedious, but there was little that is tedious about De Profundis in the Music Room at Assembly Rooms. Callow held the audience in the palm of his hand, and at certain times you could have heard

the literal pin drop.

Even if you did not know the story of Oscar Wilde, you would have been swept up by this tale. I was absolutely there in the cell with Oscar, aligning with him in his arguments (against and with himself), and tripping down the stairs with him in the lodging house where he stayed with Bosie when the latter was laid low with influenza.

Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labour for indecency from 1895-1897, a penance that appeared to hang heavy on him one minute, but also allowed him a breather within which to hope for a future for himself and his love.

There is none it appears for the Irishman and his long-suffering wife.

The play is a letter written to his lover Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas. by Wilde who is resident in Reading Gaol. Although he was not allowed to write any fiction he was permitted to write a fictitious letter to Bosie which he was not allowed to send. It is perfectly eloquent, perfectly tortured and a real love letter.

This play was adapted by Frank McGuinness and directed by Mark Rosenblatt and comes here from The West End Classic Spring Oscar Wilde Season where it was acclaimed.

Simon Callow is not a stranger here in Edinburgh, having made his stage debut at the Assembly Hall Theatre in 1973 in The Thrie Estates. Well known to us in Four Weddings and a Funeral, his film credits also include Amadeus, Shakespeare in Love and Victoria and Abdul.

This was a masterclass in story telling and a deeply moving lyric journey. The award-winning Callow is a supreme actor, and if you can beg, steal or borrow a ticket then do go.