KATE RUSBY AT THE WYCOMBE SWAN

Posted on December 3, 2010 by Eddie

Category: Reviews

Last night, Sue and I went to see the wonderful Kate Rusby at the Swan Theatre in High Wycombe. The headline is that the concert was excellent: ifÂ you can get tickets to any of the other concerts on this tour you should do so. Give yourself an early Christmas treat.

The bulk of the concert was devoted to traditional English Christmas carols. There is a long tradition of Carol singing in pubs in South Yorkshire and between songs Kate told stories of being taken along to carol sings and sitting in a backroom with a colouring book and a bag of crisps. Somewhere along the line, she absorbed the songs and developed a deep love of the musical genre. Now, as you might expect these carols weren't the sweet, choir boy and candle carols so beloved of Christmas cards and TV producers. Though the words were often familiar, the tunes are raucous and lively. They have much more to do with traditional English folk singing than with a festival of nine lessons and Carols in a Cathedral. Kate's band were superb and a perfect accompaniment to her breathtaking voice. It will be a long time before I forget the haunting sound of their rendition of the Holly and the Ivy.

Kate obviously loves these old carol tunes and she told us that every song was one of her favourites. I was delighted when she announced her absolute favourite and it turned out to be the 'bells tune' for While Shepherds Watched... We used to sing this tune when we went carol singing with my church youth group back in the 1970s and it has always saddened me that so few people seem to know it (though Kate's version was slightly different to the one I know).

If you can't get to see Kate, you might well enjoy her Christmas themed CD, Sweet Bells.

In addition to the Christmas songs she threw in a few items from her new CD, Make the Light which sounds as though it will be well worth buying. There was also a superb solo item from her husband (who plays in her band), Damien O'Kane. The band also played a couple of instrumental items written by the accordion player. One of them was dedicated to the Ryton and Crawcrook district allotment society, which drew a great cheer from the three people in the audience who knew where Ryton and Crawcrook are.

All in all, it was a great evening; one of the best concerts I've seen in a long time. I've only one little quibble and that is I wish that Kate had taken as much delight in the words of the songs as she did in the tunes. The Christmas message isn't about music, it's about Jesus. I can understand the need to lop the odd verse out of a carol or two to fit the strict timing of a concert - but it was sad, as was the point where she mixed together two verses from Oh Little Town of Bethlehem for no apparent reason. Still, I don't suppose most people noticed and it was a great evening.

She didn't sing this one, but I love it.