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# Dublin Theatre Festival 2015: you won't want to leave 'The Last Hotel'

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*Photo by Hugh O'Connor used with kind permission from Dublin Theatre Festival*

## The Last Hotel by Donnacha Dennehy and Enda Walsh

Rating: ★★★★★

She might not be the centre of the universe, but the universe centres itself in her and living is not large enough for all she can contain. He sees her death as a means to his ends and his ends amount to all she's come to renounce. Meanwhile his wife oscillates between the emptiness he embodies and a yearning for love, a yearning for something more, a yearning that connects her to the woman. In "The Last Hotel" one woman prepares for her final act after a chilling rehearsal. Fragmented, discordant, poetic, "The Last Hotel" is an astonishing new opera by Landmark Productions and Wide Open Opera which harmonises music, voice, text and performance into a rare, dark experience of near mythic proportions.

Composed by Donnacha Dennehy, with libretto by Enda Walsh, "The Last Hotel" squares life and its absurdities against the inevitability, finality and release of death. Here the end of our days are

played out in a two star hotel overseen by a silent porter, a sort of Charon of the hotel lobby, preparing blood stained rooms for their next guest. Waiting for her room to be prepared, a woman wants to check in so she can check out early, wanting to leave it all behind, the children, the demands, the PR job. She enlists the help of a chance acquaintance, a builder she once met who, along with his unhappy wife, journeys by sea to assist her on her final voyage.

Like some rare, planetary alignment, "The Last Hotel" is a mesmerising spectacle greater than the sum of its excellent, constituent parts. Donnacha Dennehy's spectacular score, dense, intense and discordant, is exquisitely realised by Crash Ensemble under the excellent guidance of conductor Alan Pierson. Married to Dennehy's evocative music, Enda Walsh's minimalist libretto has a poetic simplicity, its short phrases functioning to conjure a labyrinth of suggestive possibilities. Mythic, yet grounded in the ordinary, Walsh's libretto suggests many themes beyond death, assisted or otherwise. Gender surfaces almost as strongly as men dream shallow dreams and can sleep oblivious to a woman's yearnings or hungers.

Excellence courses throughout "The Last Hotel's" technical team, beginning with an exquisite set design by Jamie Vartan. If the projected lyrics were obscured on occasion, particularly if seated near the front, Vartan's angled and elevated stage made for an incredible centre piece. Lighting designer, Adam Silverman and sound designers, David Sheppard and Helen Atkinson, contributed much to "The Last Hotel's" mood and atmosphere. Against this Michael Murfi as the hotel porter displays superb physicality and presence, being utterly mesmerising without ever saying a word or singing a note. Soprano Claudia Boyle, as the woman wishing for death, gives an absolutely stunning performance. Baritone Robin Adams as the man, and soprano Katherine Manley as his deeply troubled wife were equally outstanding. If vocals seemed to inhabit the upper register a little too often, locked in battle with the soaring score at times, this is offset by some sublime singing, with Boyle's final lament as she prepares to die being particularly memorable.

Like any true work of art, one encounter is never enough to experience all it has to offer. The same holds true for "The Last Hotel." Densely rich, unrelentingly intense and beautifully performed, "The Last Hotel" grips you from the outset and won't let go till the end. Superb. Sublime. Surrender.

"The Last Hotel" by Donnacha Dennehy and Enda Walsh, co-produced by Landmark Productions and Wide Open Opera, runs at The O'Reilly Theatre, Belvedere College as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival.

For information on dates, times and tickets visit [Dublin Theatre Festival](#)

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Theatre Examiner



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