

Wexford late night magic: The Cáca Milis cabaret

by Ciarán Kelly

One addition to October's festive spirit this year will be the celebration of Hallowe'en at the Cáca Milis Cabaret, a late-night alternative event that has wound its way into the town's monthly calendar during 2009.

Described in the Irish Times as "a late night monthly date with music, comedy, poetry and whatever you're having yourself," the evening billed itself from the outset as an anti-recession plot, deliberately charging only five euro admission. Its website even boasts the catchphrase, "recession, what recession?"

Being a labour of love, as such, without funding, it's a venture where performers show up, perform and usually stay to enjoy the whole show whether they are young hopefuls or established artistes. The atmosphere is one of irreverence and spontaneity, and fits more into the Brechtian definition of a "people's cabaret" than what you'd find in the lounge of a five-star hotel.

The blank black stage is brought to life each time by its MC and coordinator Helena Mulkerns, whose tongue-in-cheek banter is enhanced by a singular forties' movie-vamp glamour and a willingness to deliver French cabaret or 1920s jazz songs with equal verve. In this, she's accompanied by Wexford musicians such as Fintan Cleary or Kate McKenna, or the excellent Django Rheinhardt-style trio Ain't Misbehavin'.

The show is basically a post-modern vaudeville review, presenting a series of performers in a variety of disciplines - including film, multimedia and dance. Mulkerns cites her interest in the genre as originating partly from a similar stint in Manhattan's Sin-é café in the eighties.

Elizabeth Whyte, Director of the Wexford Arts Centre, who formerly worked in New York's theatre scene, had seen the original performances in Sin-é café, and felt that such a venture would suit the Wexford Arts Centre's theatre space. "While the idea is to

provide a theatre stage for Wexford-based talent," she says, "We've also had very well-known artists such as Kevin McAleer, Eleanor McEvoy and Mick Flannery join us for the Cabaret, not to mention acts from as far away as Australia, Bulgaria, Congo, Hungary and Germany."

Thus, the localised focus has presented an astonishing range of emerging talent from Wexford down the months, in all fields. And the broader "open door" policy will see a lineup where Wexford poet Westley Barnes - whose wry humour would definitely not fit into a five-star hotel lounge - read on the same boards as hit playwright Billy Roche, just back from his off-Broadway New York success.

Ultimately, sitting down at a candle-lit table without a programme is quite liberating. You know there will be young men and women with guitars. But you never know what else. Thus far, the traditional Dog and Cat act has yet to make the stage, but one feels it's only a matter of time before one contacts the Cáca website and shows up ...



The Cáca Milis has everything from belly dancing to jazz.



Cáca Milis co-ordinator Helena Mulkerns on stage at The Arts Centre.



Leni Morrisson of PAN and singer Johnny Stewart at the Cáca Milis Cabaret.