

IN THE HUT

(A one-act monologue play)
By Mattie Lennon

SET; A small security hut on right side of stage. With a “window” opening at the front and a door opening at the right. A middle-aged Bus Inspector, in uniform is seated in the hut, his head and shoulders visible through the “window” opening. He is holding a two-way radio in his hand. There is a backdrop on which is projected a picture of a modern office-block which metamorphoses into an image of the old Theatre Royal and back again, at the appropriate time.

BUS INSPECTOR; Bus Control to all drivers. Exercise caution as you are approaching Galloping Green, I’m told there’s fog on the road there.

(DISGUISED MALE VOICE ON RADIO): Is that on the way into town or the way out?

BUS INSPECTOR (leaving down handset): Smart-ass. I’m supposed to stand out there on the road doing this job, you know. In all weathers. It’s just that I’m well got with the head security man, here at Hawkin’s House (a Corkman) and he lets me use this hut. One of my superiors, a “Customer Service Manager” came in and caught me here one day. I was eatin’ a sandwich and he reported me to my Divisional Manager. ‘Said I was drinking tea. Just shows you the way he was fed as a young lad when he doesn’t know the difference between two slices of bread and a cup of tea. I was only in here for three minutes when he caught me. So I nicknamed him “the three-minute man”. I passed on the sobriquet to my subordinates, without elaboration or explanation. And it took on the desired connotation.

That’s nearly a month ago and I haven’t seen him since. But he could appear anytime. He might be here this morning. He’s like that. Goes underground for ages and then suddenly re-appears. Like a dose of syphilis that wasn’t caught in time. You won’t see him if it’s raining though. There are four species that don’t like getting wet; asses, cats, corner-boys and Customer Service Managers..

But I was telling you about Hawkins House here. It’s the headquarters of the Department of Health and Education. It was built on the site of the old Theatre Royal. (Pointing towards backdrop which metamorphoses into image of the old Theatre Royal as he speaks)

There once stood one of the finest Theatre in the whole of Ireland, the Royal. With a splendid look from the outside and an interior to match. . With smartly dressed ushers standing at the doors in their wine coloured uniforms. Many renowned world stars of screen and stage appeared there over the years. One that springs to mind was a famous cowboy “Roy Rogers” and his horse called “Trigger.“ Bill Hailey and the Comets, of the “ one two three o’clock four o clock rock” fame.

You could go to an afternoon matinee that consisted of a variety show followed by a movie, and the same show was performed again that evening. One of the highlights of the variety show was the famous Tommy Dando who was an organist who would appear coming up through the floor at the side of the stage playing this gigantic Whurtzler organ much to the delight of the audience who would join in a sing-song with the words on a backdrop on the stage, no digital in those days.

The Royal was famous for its female dance troop “The Royalettes”. This was a group of about thirty females performing dance routines to precision timing in their special dance costumes. Otherwise known as tiller girls. There was Noel Purcell, Mickser Reid, a dwarf (there was some smart spakes about Mickser's anatomy, I'm telling you). And of course the Royalties; a troupe of dancers also known as Tiller Girls. They were mini skirted before it was fashionable (The mini-shirt, not the dancing).

They weren't allowed to sit down between acts. They had to stand against a padded rail. So that they wouldn't pucker their costumes. Some of them would be well puckered after the show, says you. Oh big changes.

A beautiful building that was demolished to build this monstrosity (pointing to backdrop which slowly changes back to image of office-block). When I first came to Dublin the Theatre Royal was in full swing I first came to the city to work on the buildings. The money wasn't great and the proceeds from the sale of scrap lead and anything else weighing less than a ton that wasn't nailed down helped.

FIRST MALE VOICE OVER RADIO; Fourth Ballinteer to control. Over.

INSPECTOR; Receiving you. Over.

FIRST MALE VOICE ON RADIO; I'm running late and the fifth car is in front of me. Will I transfer my load on to him and turn? Over.

INSPECTOR; Hold on. Over. Control to five forty-eight A. Over.

SECOND MALE VOICE ON RADIO; Receiving you. Over.

INSPECTOR; The car ahead of you is behind you . Will you take his passengers. Over.

SECOND VOICE ON RADIO; OK.Over.

INSPECTOR; Back to fourth Ballinteer.

FIRST MALE VOICE ON RADIO; Receiving you. Over.

INSPECTOR; Transfer your load and cross over. Over. (Leaving down handset) Your time is not your own in this job. Where was I. . . Oh, yes, I was telling you about when I worked in the construction industry. Well I used to socialise with a number of Bus Conductors in Ranelagh and they always appeared to have money. And I was soon to learn what “making the rent” meant in busman's parlance. It meant forgetting to issue a ticket for the fare tendered. And according to my informants it was a lucrative and widespread practice on certain routes. And stories of pelvic activities with female passengers cropped up too frequently to be all imaginings. At the time I

was working for a mild mannered building contractor named Peter Ewing. He paid the rate (or slightly above it) and working conditions were good but I applied for a job on the buses. There was a television ad running at the time “wanted, two men to crew this Dublin bus”. I was called into CIE’s head office for an interview and came up with a suitable pack of lies in response to the question “why do you want to work for CIE?”.

Next came the exam. This consisted of doing sums and writing an essay. I thought I could manage the essay but I would nearly have to open my trousers to count to twenty-one.

However my lack of mathematical prowess in the latter was more than compensated for by my dubious talent for reading upside down, sideways, or at any obtuse angle that presented itself. I sometimes tell people that I acquired this ability when I worked in a printer’s. This is a lie . . . it is a natural defect which, coupled with good sight, enabled me to cog from the fellow beside me, behind me or anywhere in the vicinity.

My essay, “Why I want to be a Bus Conductor” was a not-quite Kavan-esque account of snagging turnips in the frost, loading dung, picking stones and cutting thistles. And how, when the building trade would slow down, I didn’t want to go back to such menial agricultural tasks. If this document is extant today it would embarrass me (and that is not easily done).

I passed the exam and when the Doctor, at the cursory, “medical” checked my lungs and counted my testicles I was in.

After a week in the training school and a further week with a conductor I was let loose on the travelling public, with a bag and ticket machine. The minimum fare at the time was sixpence and a significant proportion of the travelling public were conscientious about the conservation of paper. On certain routes you would be offered five pence or even four pence with the immortal words “go ahead” or the less laconic would say “spare the paper”.

The drawback to this profitable and challenging exercise was that, if an Inspector boarded, you could be “booked” and end up in the Manager’s office accused of “making the rent”.

A small percentage (and only a small percentage) of rent-makers was sacked. I survived. “Top Cat” was one of the most feared Cigiri. If “Top Cat” found anything wrong on a bus he would alight in the best of humour; humming a catchy tune. But if everything was ship-shape it was a grumpy and unsociable “Top Cat” that got off.

The detection rate for rent-making was kept to a minimum by drivers “giving the Billy”. A bus coming in the opposite direction would flash the lights and give a coded signal to indicate where the Inspector was and who exactly it was. This information was then relayed to the rent-maker by his own driver who would flash the saloon-lights and/or rattle the gear lever and slam the cab door.

When OPO, (one Person Operation) came into force it didn’t stop “rent-making” but it increased the detection rate. One driver, who had been caught a number of times, eventually had his employment terminated. At his dismissal the Garage Manager, sarcastically, remarked, “Well thank you for bringing back the bus anyway”. “Oh, no” says your man, “Thank your for the loan of it”.

I eventually qualified as a driver. And then it was my turn to rattle the gear-lever etc. and warn drivers coming in the opposite direction in the appropriate manner. Each conductor had a pack of Emergency

Tickets, for use in the event of a malfunction of the ticket machine. One old Inspector referring to one particular route said, “Every fucking ticket given out on this road is an emergency ticket”.

Conductors from certain garages would hold a “rent-makers ball”. This was an annual get-together the venue for which would be kept secret from “outsiders”. The story may be acropical

but it was said that on one such event a neighbour asked his wife, “what’s the noise from X . . s”? When told “They are holding a rent-makers ball” he is alleged to have said” Well. I wish to fuck they’d let it go”.

When I was a conductor I was too busy trying to supplement my wages to chat up any commuting female who might be agreeable to gentle vibrations administered at regular intervals to the lower abdomen. Many of my colleagues expended a lot of energy through horizontal jogging. And one in particular described the phenomena of getting the occasional cailin ag iompar as, “an occupational hazard”.

T.E. Hulme said that the steel staircase of the emergency exit at Picadilly Circus was the most uncomfortable place in which he had ever copulated. He mustn’t ever attempted to hide the baldy-miner on the back seat of a Bombardier bus.

There was a conductor on the Seventy-six route who was renowned for his wit or in the parlance of the day “ he had words at will”. (It was he who said, when female drivers came into the job, that the cab should now be called “the box-office”.) One day going through Fettercairn he was taking a lot of stick from a mother with two kids. When he could take no more he asked, “Are they twins Missus?”. The enraged mother snapped, “how the fuck would they be twins, when one of them is eight an’ the other one is five; are ye stupi’ or wha’?” “No” says the conductor, “It’s just that I didn’t think anyone would ride you twice”.