

Reviews

Live Review

**SEAMUS HEANEY/
LIAM O'FLYNN**

The Barbican.

I DON'T make a habit of meeting Nobel prizewinners on the tube so imagine my astonishment when I got on at Hounslow West and sat down opposite Famous Seamus, the day before his gig at the Barbican.

Stammeringly, I leant across and told him that my English teacher had once seen him in the street and had not spoken to him. My teacher regretted it ever since and I would not make the same mistake.

He smiled and we were soon chatting amiably about Ted Hughes, pipe music, Lawrence Sterne and so on, until I changed trains in Hammersmith. "See you tomorrow Seamus," I said.

Call me an old romantic, but there is something magical about a poet, who represents the great tradition of bards down the ages. The spiritual warmth of his hulking presence and the resonating music of his voice have

haunted me every time I have read his poems since I saw him read in Leeds 15 years ago.

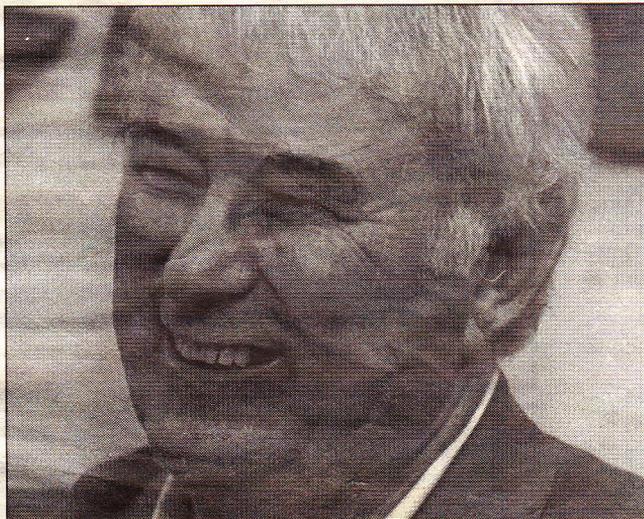
At the Barbican, Heaney seemed a slightly hesitant, diffident reader of his poetry. It was difficult at first for him to compete with Liam O'Flynn's virtuosity on the uilleánn pipes. Music communicates so directly with the soul and needs no filter, no translation of metaphor and so no real tuning into. Heaney acknowledged this difference

in the two arts when he explained the technique behind one of his poems. He said, "You don't need to know that, but when Liam plays you can see he is a master".

After the interval when both men had undoubtedly wet their whistles, Heaney's readings became more impassioned and dramatic, as though he were waking up to the unremembered fact of his own greatness.

O'Flynn is clearly a master on his instrument and on the clapometer, drew the larger applause of the two. Until the end that is, when an ovation for Heaney was clearly an appreciation for numerous moments of private ecstasy.

DAVID SMITH



SEAMUS HEANEY: Spiritual warmth.