

# PERSPECTIVE

VOL 17 / NO.2 / MARCH - APRIL 2008 / £4 (€7)



THE ROYAL SOCIETY  
OF ULSTER ARCHITECTS



9 770967 217018

# THE THEATRE OF DREAMS



Architects' plans and artists' impressions are all very well - but hearing an architect talk with passion about the building he or she is designing really is the business. Plans, by their very nature, are one dimensional – tricky to read for those of us without expertise in the area and sometimes a little overwhelming – but hearing John Tuomey and Sheila O'Donnell talk about their vision for the new Lyric Theatre on the banks of the Lagan makes my heart skip a beat. Those of us who've been charged with guiding the Lyric through this remarkable period in its life have a clear idea of what we want from our new building – and John and Sheila are giving voice to that in a very practical way. It's clear that their vision for the new building is also our vision. They are turning our dreams into a reality.

The new Lyric will be a landmark building in a city which is proudly lifting its head after decades of looking at its feet. At last our politicians are beginning to understand what our patrons have known for years – the arts really do matter to people, and you can judge what a society thinks of itself by looking at how it values and invests in its cultural landscape. The good news is that culture is finally on the agenda in a meaningful way here. I am convinced that the Lyric has helped to make that happen and, as an institution, is committed to playing a lead role in the future.

The new Lyric will be both beautiful to look at and practical to use – two things you could never really have said about our existing building. The use of Belfast brick will mean the new theatre echoes the existing south Belfast landscape. The extensive use of glass will maximise the presence of natural light in the public spaces and ensure that our magnificent river aspect can be enjoyed to its full potential. In practical terms too, the layout of the new spaces – both public and private – will mean audiences and staff alike are guaranteed a positive experience.

Our Patron, Liam Neeson, has talked about how the Lyric was a Belisha beacon during the darkest days of our recent turbulent past – and he's right. The Lyric was a safe, neutral place for people to escape the violence on the streets and re-connect with the better side of human nature. It provided people with a space to think. The new Lyric will face new challenges, very different to those which faced the organisation in 1968 when our existing building first opened its doors. I have no doubt that our current patrons will wholeheartedly endorse the new building when it opens for business in early 2010, but the real challenge for us is to connect with a whole new audience of schoolchildren, lapsed theatre-goers - dare I say it, 'theatre sceptics'? Getting the right building in place – one that is both functional and memorably handsome – will make that job so much more achievable. So, no pressure then John and Sheila...

## **Mark Carruthers**

Mark Carruthers is Chairman of the Lyric Theatre.

See page 14 'Curtain Call'.