



# A LOVE SUPREME

*We popped along to see I Left My Heart in Roker Park at the Customs House recently. Although we're not what you'd describe as regular theatre goers here at ALS, the play was great and Sunderland fans of any age will no doubt enjoy this emotional journey through the trials and tribulations of Sunderland AFC seen through the eyes of one fan. We even admit to having tears of joy and sorrow in our eyes on more than one occasion and were delighted to discover you could sit and watch the play with a pint in hand. After the show we bumped into Tom Kelly, the writer, propping up the bar and in exchange for a pint of lager and a packet of peanuts he agreed to an impromptu interview.*

## **For those who didn't see the play what is it about?**

The play looks at Sunderland Football Club through the eyes of die-hard Sunderland supporter, Kevin Halliday. The play charts Kevin's life: his marriage, divorce and heartaches, all linked with the rise and fall of his beloved club's fortunes.

## **What inspired the story?**

The closure of Roker Park in 1997. A feeling that all those memories, all those years of families supporting their team were just disappearing. Me Dad and Uncle Johnny walked from Jarrow to Roker Park to see the lads in the Hungry Thirties. If Sunderland Football club didn't run through my veins, I couldn't not write the play.

## **Why should people see it?**

For Sunderland supporters it will bring back memories from Charlie Fleming and Dick Malone right through to Gary Rowell and Kevin Phillips, but it also looks at how life, love and football are linked: it is a love story, a love of football and the central characters belief in love enduring, eventually.

## **Is Kevin inspired by anyone?**

Some of the stories of going to the match are mine but it is really a tribute and testimony to all Sunderland supporters who have cheered on the terraces at Roker Park and now at the Stadium of Light.

## **Do you have any particular anecdotes?**

One of my first games was at Roker Park in the mid 1950s, (1958 to precise) Sunderland where playing Juventus; John Charles was in the Italian team. It was a night game. It was pure magic. I was on an organised bus trip from Jarrow. The pitch was a field of dreams, the players were Gods. The white lines were beacons. This was theatre. It was so exciting and I was there with fifty odd thousand Sunderland supporters. We got beat. It didn't matter. Magic has a price.

## **How did you feel watching the play?**

Emotional and very proud. It was lovely to see my play strike a chord with so many people: it meant something to them. On the Friday night the audience rose as one and gave David a standing ovation: never to be forgotten. And all the reviews were so positive but more importantly the audience and I suspect many don't usually go to the theatre, were moved and thoroughly enjoyed the play. What more could a writer ask?

## **Are there plans to stage the play again?**

There are very tentative plans to stage the production, so keep your eyes and ears open and ALS will be the first to know. Promise. I'll have another lager and a packet of salted nuts. Too late?

The barman shouted last orders. Tom jumped onto the Metro and I was left with my memories of I Left My Heart In Roker Park, we will keep you informed when the play is to appear again, buy your ticket quickly, it will sell out.

*An edited version of an interview first published in Issue 121 of A Love Supreme, written by **Andrew Fury***

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