

The Diary

Steve Canavan

also writes in Wow247 on Thursday and 7 days on Saturday



Your Essential Entertainment Guide

Email steve.canavan@blackpoolgazette.co.uk

It's a long journey from a garden to the West End

For a bloke who used to work as a landscape gardener, local lad Tim Clarke hasn't done too badly for himself.

He has performed on West End stages more than 800 times and has written an opera with Neil Hannon.

But not content with that, he is now making an attempt to launch a career as a singer-songwriter and has released an album of his own songs.

"I've always had this love of making my own music but the strange thing is there's more pressure releasing an album and gigging, than there is performing a major musical at a big theatre in London," said the 54-year-old.

"In a musical there's a cast of 30 and the audience are in to have a good time. But when you're in a pub in Macclesfield on a rainy Tuesday night and no one knows who you are there is no hiding place."

Clarke's life story is fascinating. He grew up on Green Drive in Lytham (his mum still lives in the area), went to St Joseph's College (near Stanley Park, now a housing estate) and then, devoid of ideas about what to do as a career, started playing bars in Blackpool in the nattily-named cabaret band Bazooka Joe.

Next came a few years abroad in France and Germany, which is where the gar-

'I had a bizarre lawnmowers and rock 'n' roll lifestyle'

dening comes in. "I worked as a landscape gardener during the day and went to music sessions at night," recalled Tim. "I had this bizarre lawnmowers and rock 'n' roll lifestyle."

Tim eventually returned to Blackpool and did a performing arts degree as a mature student, then got a post grad in electronic composition. All the while he played the hotels and clubs and had some success, winning the Viking's Talk of the Coast competition and representing the resort on the old BBC show Top Town, performing some of his songs.

His big break came courtesy of Bill Kenwright. "I went to London to audition for a show. I sang Reet Petite - which I was singing in my act in Blackpool - and Kenwright said he loved it and asked me where I'd been all this time," said Tim.

A role in the UK touring a version of Jesus Christ Superstar followed before, in 1989, Tim got the part of Norman Petty in a new musical called The Buddy Holly Story.

"It was the first biog musical and no one really expected it to be a hit, but the theatre was packed every night and it was a fantastic time," said Tim.

The rest is history. He starred in the show for more than three years (including a stint in Germany), and has since appeared in an array of West End shows.

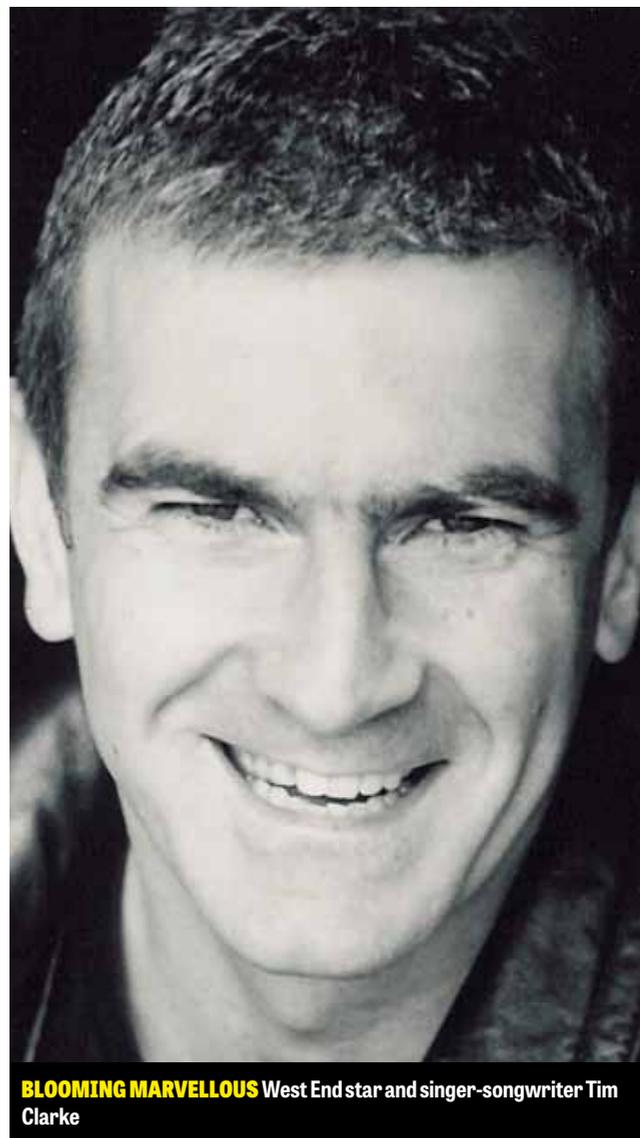
In the last few years he's combined that with writing an opera with Neil Hannon, the hugely respected frontman of The Divine Comedy. "He has a fantastic ear for music and I learned so much from him," said Tim. And now he's taking the plunge and embarking on a songwriting career of his own.

Debut album To Love And Be Loved has been released and Tim is taking it so seriously he's even stopped auditioning for shows.

"I want to give it my best shot," he added. "The album is very personal and aimed at a more mature audience, 35 plus, as they will relate to what I sing about."

"Hopefully people will like it but I'm under no illusions. I've been in the business long enough to know it can either kick you in the teeth or be marvellously rewarding."

To order the album, or for more information about Tim, go to www.timclarkemusic.com or email him direct at timclarkemusic@hotmail.co.uk



BLOOMING MARVELLOUS West End star and singer-songwriter Tim Clarke

Austrian dance crew set to take The Grand by storm

An award-winning Austrian dance crew will light up the Grand Theatre tonight.

Described as an extraordinary mix of breakdance, popping and locking, contemporary dance, acrobatics and ballet, the show is called Out Of The Shadow and features a cast of 10.

It is set to a soundtrack which combines classical and original contemporary music and tells a cautionary tale, from the creation of the Universe and evolution of man through to an imaginary apocalyptic future.

Not sure exactly what that means but I'm looking forward to finding out. The show starts at 8pm, tickets from www.blackpoolgrand.co.uk or call (01253) 743339.

Also coming to the Grand soon - and continuing the rather highbrow nature of this article - are the operas Aida and Nabucco.

Award-winning opera director/producer Ellen Kent brings to life Aida's story of war, jealousy and revenge, set amid the splendour and mystery of ancient Egypt.

Nabucco, meanwhile, is the first opera Ellen ever directed and includes the best loved of all opera ensemble numbers - the Chorus of the Hebrew slaves. The shows are on Saturday November 9 and Sunday 10.

Nicky's Irish dance with Will.I.Am

Blackpool's Nicky Figgins, who toured the world in Spirit of the Dance, has a new partner... Will.I.Am.

She ended up doing an Irish jig with the American superstar during the recording of BBC show The Voice.

"It was a bit weird - but a good weird, in fact absolutely brilliant!" said Nicky, who runs the Nicky Figgins Centre

Stage Dance Academy on Red Bank Road in Bispham.

"Myself, my mum and a friend went to see the show being recorded and we ended up sat on the front row, about 12 feet away from the judges.

"The warm-up guy asked if there were any dancers and so my mum screamed that I was. I told him I did Irish dancing, he said Will.I.Am loves Irish

dancing but there's no chance of him joining in because he doesn't join in with the audience."

Except this time he did. Watched by fellow judges Tom Jones, Kylie Minogue and Ricky Wilson from the Kaiser Chiefs, Will.I.Am leapt from his chair when Nicky started doing her jig.

"He watched what I did and

got into the rhythm of it, then I let go of his hand and clapped him while he did it on his own," she said.

"When the music finished, he gave me a hug and I went back to my seat shaking and thinking 'Oh my God'.

"At the end of the show the warm-up man said he was giving a signed Kylie CD to the most enthusiastic person in

the audience - and he handed it to me."

Whether Nicky's dancing efforts make it on screen when the next series of The Voice begins remains to be seen.

"The cameras were running so you never know, they might show it," she said.

"Whatever happens, it wasn't a bad way to spend an afternoon."



CD TREAT Nicky Figgins with the CD she won on The Voice