



I haven't ever attended a big-time opening night before, and I guess I should have waited near the rope line to see the celebrities I wouldn't have recognised (since they're all British) but since I had spent Â£15 for a first row Dress Circle ticket I was able to walk down the red carpet myself (yes, I'm not making this up) and past the gawking fans, and into the theatre and into the bar where, herded like sheep to slaughter, I waited for the opportunity to take my seat.

When I did so my immediate neighbours pointed out Peter Hall, the director, in the 8th row, and his minion seated around him. One made this quip, "I see the press have been given seats on the centre aisle. I imagine that's so they can go for another drink without disturbing anyone." True enough, the centre aisle was lined with serious people with laps covered in notebooks writing away. I'll read all about it in the morning.

I have been to see a lot of shows at this point, and for many of them my seat mates have been pairs of men. I don't think they're all gay. It just seems that it is very acceptable here that men may go out together to the theatre, dance, what have you. There is a much greater freedom for people here, in public, to show affection for others of the same sex. It is quite common to see people walking arm in arm down the street or through a museum, and I'm not referring to couples, just friends. It is refreshing.

Anyway, the gentlemen to my right were such a pair, while to my left was a young Tony Blair wannabe constantly thumbing away on his Blackberry during interval. Across the theatre, in a box, was a quite old man with an attractive younger woman. One of the men to my right said, "Do you think that's decoration or staff?" to which his pal replied, "Oh, staff, definitely." It was at about this time that the woman in the box donned her jacket, covering her plunge neckline and ample bosom. Our attention turned elsewhere.

The show, *The Vortex* by Noel Coward, was quite good. A tense drama from 1920's society, it starred Felicity Kendal - a favourite of telly dramas and sitcoms. She turned in a good performance, as did Dan Stevens as her son. Nothing earth shaking, but a good night out. Oh, and the director had left the house before curtain call, which he did not join.