

Spike Milligan as funny as ever

AT THE THREE ARTS: The Spike Milligan Show (with Ashley Parker, the Nöl Klinkhamer Quartet, Anna Raven, Gary and Spider). Presented by the Quibell Brothers.

Spike Milligan comes on with the face of a saint, white bearded, and the eyes of a visionary. He is dressed in blue denim and wears a shirt

with a conservationist slogan. One does not expect clowning from such a fellow, and that might be why he is so funny.

It can be only one of

the reasons, though. It is a singularly hopeless task to try to define humour or to reason why something is funny, but, apart from contrast, Milligan has a magnificent sense of timing, an extraordinary verbal wit and a presence which takes us on a sort of magical mystery tour of a unique and gifted mind.

The audience of more than 2000 at the Three Arts last night roared their appreciation, even though one might think the Milligan humour a little too rarefied for a mass audience. This was far from the case. As far as I could see everyone was having a very good time indeed.

Milligan is so quick that one's laughter — or, at least amusement — is more or less continuous. He varies the type, too, from broad to wild flights of surreal poetic fancy, such as a typical French breakfast of poets and frogs' legs, with the coffee served in bidets. (At least, I thought that was what he said and it is such a remarkable image it is a pity to waste it.)

For the many thousands of Milligan fans, though, all they will really want to know is whether the veteran Goon has still the gift of inspired madness, whether he is still as funny as he was. The answer is certainly: Yes.

THEATRE
by
Owen Williams

His act might have deepened, in fact, to the point where it is better than it has ever been, though much of the old material is there. His style, if anything, has improved.

Ashley Parker accompanies Mr Milligan on stage, playing and singing in a folk/rock/blues idiom, while the master seems to pause for refreshment and solace. Ashley sings pleasantly, with a certain charm.

Mr Ronald Quibell is a man of expansive and generous tastes, and he has packed a great deal into the first half. The result, unfortunately, is that it is too long.

The Nöl Klinkhamer Quartet are an able and skilful group, who can handle complex melodies in various styles, Gary and Spider brought applause with some knock-about humour, Anna Raven sang with some force. It could all be pruned, though.