



SPIKE!

HE cut an enviable figure on that steamy February night as he stood, white hair blowing in the breeze of three fans, while the other fans sweltered.

The enviable figure he cut was a dummy — hee hee ho hee — which he punched and hammered too. Chuckle, chortle, chinkle.

The humour is inimitable, which is why we shall proceed not to imitate it. Spike Milligan is a master of the absurd — he tugs laughter out of us like a mischievous child that gets what it wants.

To get the most out of Milligan one must have some sort of Goonery background, since he produces the sort of silliness which evokes hysteria in a convert or nausea in a pagan. On Friday night the Australian on my left giggled non stop, while the stranger on my right looked mystified and said so until mercifully he fell asleep.

The irreverence begins when Spike shuffles on stage at Durban's Playhouse Theatre in his crumpled denims and flapping shirt, with the band. Everyone cheers — Spike keeps walking, disappearing into the wings.

One feels a little anxious. Will he come back. He's known to be a temperamental genius. Maybe one look at us rows of grinning sweaty white faces was enough. (Why, incidentally was it so hot in the theatre that night??)

He does come back, maybe to have a drink of "Needy Bugger" as he renames for all time one of our revered wines.

Blue eyes glinting with merriment, he mutters to himself, relapses into noisy gibberish or plays the flight of the Bumble Bee with his finger in his mouth.

It's hilarious because the dialogue seems a spontaneous bubbling up of wild energy in the form of wit. Of course it's not that impromptu, since devotees will recognise many of the gags — but the delivery is brilliant. Any other comic faced with a script which requires the repetition of the words "dearie me" thirty times would quail.

Interspersed among the gusts of Milligan madness are the songs of Ashley Parker, a South African folk/blues/rock singer and guitarist. His bouncy songs with their thoughtful lyrics add a sprinkling of sanity to proceedings.

The first half of the programme includes appearances by a vivacious Anna Raven who sings rollicking folk and wistful Cat Stevens numbers with versatility. Her piano accompaniment is impressive.

Quite frankly, most Milligan fans would have preferred to have had their hero before and after interval (his energy seemed boundless enough) and to have Spiked the rest.

— Marilynne Holloway