

# Folk in the traditional spirit

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## FOLK CONCERT — Soiree Society

IT WAS like a folk festival in miniature: Three of Johannesburg's top exponents of the genre plus an exciting import from the Eastern Cape singing an attractive selection of traditional, blues and contemporary songs in the relaxed, intimate style that characterised the old *Cul de Sac* and *Troubadour* days at the peak of the folk revival in South Africa.

I am not, as a rule, partial to folksingers who find it necessary to punctuate their acts with cabaret banter. That sort of thing is best left to the experts and folksingers are seldom good raconteurs — but the cheerful patter with which these young performers regaled their audience was spontaneous, disarming and entirely in the character of the evening.

A feature of the programme was the appearance of David Marks. The composer of "Mountains of Men" is heard far too seldom as a singer these days. Dave, in fine fettle, gave a beautiful rendition of "It's Just Another Way to Say Goodbye"; using a harmonica holder to supplement his guitar accompaniment, sang "One Too Many Mornings", proving once again his definitive understanding of the works of Bob Dylan, and sang Dave Marks songs as only Dave Marks can sing them.

These included his Ecology song, "Cool, Clear, Calm and Still," "The Last Song" with which he, rather whimsically, opened his second half, and two new (to me) satirical numbers, "Jolly John" (about you know who) and "The Censored Ballad of Jannie Kruger".

Brian Bebbington, whose place in the South African folk scene is a unique one, sang traditional airs, both with and without accompaniment, and a couple of choice ballads in Hebrew.

He has a fine voice which has, perhaps, been heard to better advantage. On Sunday night, the excellent acoustics

of the Lindberg hall notwithstanding, he failed to project as well as he might have with the result that I had difficulty in hearing some of his lyrics.

But there is no gainsaying his instrumental mastery. Brian plays the banjo like no one else and has exemplary command of the autoharp.

Colin Shamley, one of the more unconventional singer-composers in the field, is rapidly developing into a first rate entertainer. He breaks all the rules, gets away with it and has his audience rooting for him. His repertoire included "Pilate's Dream" from "Jesus Christ Superstar", a rarely heard Phil Ochs number and some arresting songs from his own pen. I especially liked his satirical comment on "The

Four Freedoms", his racy guitar tone poem on "Rasputin" and his by-now-well-established "Standing by the Waterfront". He plays a nifty blues guitar.

John Oakley-Smith, who hails originally from Rhodesia and comes to us from the Eastern Cape, has a highly individual talent that should make a considerable impression here. He plays both guitar and piano superbly. There is a curiously awkward quality about his song phrasing which is not unpleasant, but his voice seems to attain a lyrical fluidity in a higher register. His treatment of traditional songs is refreshingly sympathetic and I particularly liked his version of Dylan's "I Pity the Poor Immigrant". His own song, "God Keep the People" is a gem.



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