

Great vibe at Blundell benefit

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THE BENEFIT SHOW: Folk 'n Friends (Wits Great Hall)

THE ARTISTS: An All-Star Bill

THE DIRECTORS: Des and Dawn Lindberg

By Raeford Daniel

THERE'S no people like show people, proclaimed Irvin Berlin in Annie Get Your Gun. And those who overflowed the spacious Wits Great Hall at the weekend to pay tribute to Keith Blundell, whose spine was severed in a motorcycle accident in February, would, I am sure, be the first to agree.

Keith's friends and colleagues, numbering some of the top names in the South African entertainment scene, got together to put on a benefit for him. The result was one of the most memorable shows of its kind ever staged anywhere.

The vibe, of course, was an intensely emotional one. Aside from the feeling for Keith, the show was, for many, a nostalgia trip to the Folk

Revival of the Sixties, with many of the great folk exponents of the period in evidence. (Apart from those who appeared on stage, I met Clive Glover, one of the top names of the Troubadour days, now retired as a folk singer, in the foyer).

But even discounting that, the show was a superbly professional one, directed with crisp efficiency by Des and Dawn.

Unabated applause greeted each star-calibre appearance as highlight following highlight.

It all got underway with Des and Dawn leading the entire company (and the audience) in equating Keith with Tom Paxton's Ramblin Boy, then going into a number Des wrote especially for Keith,

We're Not Going to Let You Take This Living Down Old Friends.

Jeremy Taylor was there with the obligatory Ag Pleez Deddy and a new song inspired by the sausage vendors that have sprung up all over the city, convulsing the audience with its reference to the "Satanic Worses".

Dave Marks, who managed to complete the sound system, made a rare appearance on stage to sing his Master Jack. Aubrey and Beryl who, like Dave, had paid their own air fares from Cape Town to be on the show, sang Johnny Boy and That's Life.

Thandi Brewer delighted with her G-and-S parody, I am the Very Model of a Modern White South African.

Jill Kirkland accompanied by John Silver on guitar, gave exquisite renderings of 10 000 Miles and Send in the Clowns.

Mara Louw Thompson thrilled with her rendition of Sweet Georgia Brown, reminding us that all musicians were "family".

Colin Shamley sang his Stopping Time; Penny and Jack did Just Another Poor Boy and Theo Coetzee obliged with Vier Saam Vanaand.

It was not the only Afrikaans offering, however. Des did Die Gezoem van die Bye and Ian Lawrence sang a wickedly funny snatch.

Ian also sang Hoagy Carmichel's Lazy River.

Big Daddy Lance James sang The Door's Always Open.

Ensembles included the close-harmony, a capella troupe, the Take Note Quartet, who snag Yes Sir That's My Baby and This Train; the Waldorf String Band, traditional with a touch of Blue Grass, with Muirshin Dirkin and Earlye in the Morning; and Fat City, a chart rated pop group featuring Keith's son, Johnny, with Bad Habbit.

Instrumental virtuosity was courtesy of Brian Bebbington and Julian Laxton with Deuling Ban-

jos; Steve Newman and Steven Sher, while Terrence Scarr, introduced by Keith as the man in daughter Caroline life, did some nifty fiddling.

The Benegio Spanish Dancers, with Rouel and Hernando in attendance, provided some flashing zapadiadoes.

And Alan D Woolf, one of the funniest men in the business, made a hilarious tour de force of the mere expedient of announcing the winning seat numbers.

Des and Dawn introduced Keith after a rousing The Seagull's Name

was Nelson.

Keith's opening was the popular, deliciously irreverent Sister Josephine, then he joined with the evergreen Andy Dillon in Hell of a Funeral.

Caroline's and Terence did two numbers, Glory of Love and Night Life Blues, then were joined by Keith, Julie for the Java Jive.

Keith's Square Dance associate and successor Leandre Feneysel joined him in Joseph and with the whole Blundell family, including wife Pam, in Shining.

The evening ended with a spirituals medley and the presentation to Keith of the keys to the specially modified car the effort had bought for him. Together with donations, a sum in excess of R40 000 was realised.

