4-20-1985

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AN EVENING WITH STEVE RACE

20th April 1985

University of Warwick Arts Centre Theatre

Take a mixture of gentle humour, superb professionalism, excellent timing and a love of music of many kinds, and you have 'An Evening with Steve Race'. The popular chairman of BBC TV's and Radio's 'My Music' programme has been a much loved public figure for many years, but if his audience at the Arts Centre were expecting the same pleasant, relaxed man on stage, they were probably delighted to discover that he is even more pleasant and more relaxed than they had anticipated. From the moment he arrived on stage until he left it, he had his audience in the palm of his hand. They reacted instantly to him, and the pleasure this gave to him probably made the evening even more successful.

We heard anecdotes about his life in music, his friends inside and outside the BBC (those of 'My Music' were particularly hilarious and one can imagine what fun these programmes must be to do!) and we heard passages of recorded music as varied as his own tastes. From the majesty of Cockaigne by Elgar which had bowled him over as a music student of 16, to the jazz of Duke Ellington, from the beauty of Mozart to a synthesized Mussorgsky, from a song from 'Charlie Brown' to the exquisite song of the nightingale and the attractively raucous cry of the herring gull. He even played us some Stockhausen - although that was not among his favourite music, nor that of his audience. He played rock music with a heavy beat and, after assuring us that this could not be heard in
classical music, could it, he then played some Brahms which was full of the same rhythmical beat! It seems that there is really nothing new in the world of music. His foot (and our feet) tapped to Greek music and to Vaughan Williams, and, somewhere in between, we heard the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald.

But it was Steve Race the man who gave the greatest pleasure with his mixture of gentle and slightly wicked humour. His stories kept us laughing and we all reacted with surprise when it was over, for we were quite happy to sit and listen for at least another hour. That all the audience had had a thoroughly enjoyable evening was only too apparent from the comments outside the theatre - 'the happiest evening I've ever spent in a theatre', 'I've never enjoyed a night out so much', 'I laughed so much my glasses steamed up!' The George Eliot Fellowship's reaction was even warmer, for we had not only benefitted from a superb evening's entertainment but from several hundred pounds to be added to the Statue Appeal Fund. The only regret was that the audience was smaller than we had hoped. Despite considerable publicity and even the provision of transport from Nuneaton, about 300 of the 500 theatre seats were empty. But the 200 odd who came had had a splendid evening, and those who stayed away missed a rare treat. One of the nicest men in the world known as 'Show Business' had given us two precious hours to help us raise money for the statue, but he had also given us an evening we shall not forget. We hope our thanks, our warm response, and our laughter will stay with him for a very long time. He chose to work for us for nothing, but he must have received a tremendous glow of warmth from those who came to see him.

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