

# ROYAL VARIETY ARTISTS LACK STAGE "LIFE"

## GRACIE FIELDS' APPEAL

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Daily Telegraph Theatre Reporter

**T**HE Royal Variety Performance, which might equally be called the Royal Television Artists' Performance, took place before the Queen last night at the London Palladium. The second title implies no criticism of the producers for leaning so heavily on the home screen.

There is no consistency in bemoaning the dependence on television while regretting the closing of our variety theatres. The dependence inevitably followed the closing.

### LITTLE BEAT

Little beat music was heard. Is this a sign? Is it on its way out? Ballads dominated. Four girls, Cilla Black, Millicent Martin, Kathy Kirby and tiny Brenda Lee (3,000 miles from New York for one song) who arrived on stage in super shining cars, all sang ballads.

Wonderful Gracie Fields, as popular as ever after 50 years in show business, also sang ballads. Cliff Richard and The Shadows were gentle in their approach.

Two acts that particularly appealed because they had new material suitable for this Royal occasion were youthful ventriloquist Dennis Spicer and the zany Morecambe and Wise.



GRACIE FIELDS

In The Royal Variety Show  
(B.B.C., Sunday, 7.50 and  
9.15).

Where one may criticise, and this must one day threaten the existence of the annual show, is over the number of performers who are less "live" in the flesh than on the screen or in the recording studio.

In the electronic age the synthetic person makes the real one almost an embarrassment.

### FUMBLING MAGICIAN

Engagingly funny

None of this, of course, applies to Gracie Fields or Tommy Cooper, the fumbling magician who has the most engagingly humorous face of all our comedians. Neither does it relate, so far, to Dennis Spicer, a young ventriloquist who made a pleasant impression.

Gracie Fields gave us the whole or parts of seven songs, from "Sally" to "Wish me luck," her control not quite what it was, but still with the same direct appeal.

Tommy Cooper avoids the familiar disadvantage of magicians: our knowledge that even the most difficult tricks will succeed.

Dennis Spicer has clever dummies, one of them alive, and manages three-sided conversations, but the Buckingham Palace references, no matter how well handled, made some of the audience squirm.



Gracie Fields at the final rehearsal for last night's Royal Variety Performance at the Palladium.

with highly original and expressive witticisms, blended into hilarious entertainment.

Apart from the pleasure of Jimmy Tarbuck's act, it was interesting to see an artist modern in every way being closely linked with traditional variety.

And speaking of traditional variety brings me to Gracie Fields, making her eighth Royal Variety appearance. Star of generations, welcomed warmly, she sang as no one else could possibly sing a snatch from "Sally" as she appeared, went on to the sentimental-funny number about the duck-swan, "Scarlet Ribbons" and "Glochamorra", and, leaving behind an experience for the young and a gush of nostalgia for the older, made her exit to the strains of "Wish Me Luck". Her adept accompanist was Robert Probst.

The Moiseyev Dance Company in an elaborate Gopak were cheered mightily their dancing, acrobatics, humour, colour, pace, surprise, and

they seemed as nervous as half-set jellies.

Tommy Cooper produced a first-rate comedy-magic act that had all the confidence of someone who had played the date before and knew his audience. Like the old Crazy Gang, Cooper doesn't bow to the Royal Box. He now appears to be on nodding terms with it.

American singer Brenda Lee, who was flown over specially to appear in the show, justified her air fare.

I was about to note in my programme that Dennis Spicer was technically the best ventriloquist in the business until I discovered that one of his "dummies" was a very much alive little human being.

Gracie Fields was back again to bring applause from the Queen for September Song and Scarlet Ribbons. The Misses Black, Kirby and Martin must have blessed the man responsible for the running order of the show that they had done their bit before Gracie came on. It would be a brave little girl singer who attempted to follow a pair of lungs like Gracie's.