

Charles steps into the limelight

By KEITH FARNSWORTH

After nearly 50 years behind the scenes, 77-year-old Mr. Charles Upton stepped into the limelight last night and met singing star Gracie Fields.

Mr. Upton, a retired moulder, of Annesley Road, Greenhill, Sheffield, worked for more than 40 years as a part-time backstage hand at the old Sheffield Empire.

He saw hundreds of stars come and go, but never introduced himself . . . because he was too shy.

"I saw Gracie when she first came to Sheffield with 'Mr. Tower of London' about 40 years ago," he said. "I was a sceneshifter then, and she was really going places. But I never was one for

chasing after the celebrities."

In her City Hall dressing room, that same Gracie—a little older and greyer—became the first star he had ever been introduced to, the *Sheffield Telegraph* making the introduction during the interval.

"Hello, darling. How are you?" asked the star. "Ah reckon you're older than even me."

"I'm all right," said Mr. Upton. "Just a bit bad on the feet, you know."

"Aye, we're all getting old," quipped Gracie, and for five minutes they exchanged reminiscences about old times.

Then Mr. Upton, who was Gracie's personal guest at the show, returned to his seat for the second half.

Gracie's magic flame still burns

Gracie Fields' magic flame still burns, and though not as brightly as it once did, still brilliantly enough to warm the hearts of last night's predominantly nostalgic audience, teenagers of yesteryear clinging to a fond memory.

She admits she doesn't feel her 66 years. She doesn't look them either, for all that grey hair. Of course, her voice has grown huskier and those top notes are harder to reach. But wait . . .

Some qualities haven't changed — her personality, her enthusiasm, her complete dominance of an audience; in short, that old technique that one minute has you laughing at jokes you've heard a thousand times and the next bringing a lump to your throat.

In 80 minutes she sang, laughed, screeched and quipped her way through scores of songs, some as old as Sheffield's hills, others newer than the latest pop group.

"Ah Never Cried So Much," "Walter," "Don't Be Angry With Me, Sergeant" — the laughs resounded through the hall; but you could hear a pin drop when she put everything into "Bless This House," "Blow The Wind Southerly" and even "Hello, Dolly."

Gracie has always appealed to the emotions and sentiments of the masses. That appeal is still there. And what she offers is pure and from the heart.

You can't keep a good old 'un down, as one of her fans said. Gracie keeps on popping up, always singing. And as long as she has strength to sing she'll command an audience . . . as long as they don't all go over the hill before her. She is one of the great stars of our time.

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Gracie and Mr. Upton.