

GLORIOUS GRACIE

Warm Welcome at Palladium

(MUSICAL EXPRESS VARIETY CRITIC)

GRACIE FIELDS, MORE GLORIOUS THAN EVER, ELICITED A WARM WELCOME FROM THE HOUSE SHE PACKED AT THE LONDON PALLADIUM THIS WEEK. THIS NATIONAL IDOL HELD HER IDOLATORS SPELLBOUND UNDER HER HYPNOTIC INFLUENCE. ELEGANTLY GOWNED, CURIOUSLY YOUTHFUL, SHE APPEARED IN A DELIGHTFUL SET REPRESENTING BLACK LACE, AND THE AUDIENCE WOULD NOT ACCEPT ANY OF HER NUMBERS AS A FINALE.

Her voice is as rich as ever and her artistry is superb. Gracie is no phenomenon. She is the unchallenged Queen among all performers. In spite of her ad-libbing, her asides in the vernacular of the common people, she has a remarkable dignity comparable with that of any of the great actresses from the legitimate stage. And in spite of her clowning and cartwheels, she never loses this dignity.

Gracie's whitening hair accentuates her youthful appearance rather than detracting from it. When her fans roared for the titles they wanted what other artiste could have yelled back at them, "Aw, shut up!" and still retain that regal dignity that never leaves her throughout her performance?

There is something traditionally great in the Fields family, for on the same bill Tommy Fields, Gracie's talented brother, did extremely well in spite of the fact that he followed the greatest laugh-provoking knockabout act in the business—Warren, Latona and Sparks—who did sensationally well. Yet Tommy Fields held that audience with his patter and songs in the most surprising manner.

Val Parnell is to be congratulated on his technique in presenting the most sensational speciality acts in the world and

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GLORIOUS GRACIE

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for giving them the high spots in the programme. This enables an audience to marvel at these unique attractions while most managements throw them away either opening or closing.

Remarkable specialities this week are provided by the amazing Balladins, unprecedented jugglers, the Great Alexander Troupe who thrill on the springboard, and Eddie Gordon—a laugh a second on the cycle.

British vocal group the Smith Brothers did exceptionally well and looked immaculate in their tartan.

It's a joy to see Gracie Fields back at the Palladium again. I don't begrudge the Kayes, the Bennys and the Danny Thomases their success, but it was like the good old days to see Gracie fetch the house to its feet with that great artistry that the years seem to sharpen. On last week's showing she easily retains her title as Britain's greatest music-hall artist. Her voice is still strong and pure; her mimicry superb, and a subtle change in her technique adds to her appeal. She has grown old gracefully on the stage, and I like the new and very gracious Gracie.

Publication of the artists for the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium (Nov. 13) caused some raising of eyebrows. Notable absentee was Ted Ray, who many think our top comedian. But the show will have no lack of comedy. Of our stars there are those grand entertainers, Flanagan and Allen, together again; Nervo and Knox, and Naughton and Gold—in fact, the complete Gang, who have for so long brought us rich and rare fun.

Tommy Trinder is there, Max Miller and Max Wall, and leading the ladies the queen of them all, Gracie Fields. It really is a terrific list. From across the Atlantic Jack Benny and Dinah Shore, and with them our own brilliant young men, Frankie Howerd and Max Bygraves, who were unknown "five minutes" ago and have now reached the heights.

★ Generous Gracie

WHAT a superb performance the inimitable Gracie Fields is putting up at the Palladium! It was typically generous of her to name the author of her moving new song, "Forgive Me, Lord." For show business has not been too kind to Ord Hamilton for some time.

When he wrote "Blase" he was on top of the world as a songwriter. But in the last few years the breaks have dodged him. He recently contemplated a cabaret act with Sheila Douglas-Pennant, but the idea was still-born.

"Forgive Me, Lord," sung by Our Gracie, may well prove the means of bringing a talented songwriter back into the big time.

THE NEW GRACIE

John G. Drummond
at the Theatre



Drummond

THE regular first night customers at the Palladium are an excitable lot noted for the generosity of their judgments.

Throughout the Variety season I have listened to them saying "A great artist" as they stumbled up the aisles, although sometimes they had witnessed nothing more than the antics of some nasal nonentity with a good publicity agent.

They have shed tears of joy over so many third-raters and waxed hysterical over so many second-raters that I wondered if they would recognise a truly great artist when they saw one, and also how, short of setting fire to the theatre, they would celebrate the event.

But they recognised the greatness of Gracie Fields readily enough, and were quick to do homage to her regal position in the world of variety.

The gulf between her and the chits from across the water was acknowledged by an ovation in which the deep, rolling notes of wonder and affection replaced the shrieks and whistles of mere approval.

The exuberant lassie from Lancashire is greyer now, serene and dignified, quieter and less prone to shriek into a hilarious high note in a comedy song, but still the supreme music-hall artist of her generation.

She topped a bill of which the Palladium can be rightly proud.

REVIVALS are in fashion and two notable additions were made to the London list last week with R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*, still the best war play of modern times, at the Westminster; and *The Old Ladies*, Rodney Ackland's macabre dramatisation of Hugh Walpole's novel at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

TOMMY TRINDER, Gracie Fields, and now Frankie Howerd. Three British performers have topped the bill at London's Palladium in succession. And have they played to empty houses?

To those know-alls who said only Americans can fill the Palladium there has been a resounding answer. Business has never been better. No one is more pleased than this writer, who has pressed the claims of home-grown artists.

STAGE
By
OLD
TROUPER

Another Max will be stepping on to the top rung of the ladder for the first time—29-year-old Max Bygraves, who a year ago was playing down the bill at a Yorkshire music hall.

To-night, as the stars make their bow, he will be in the centre of the stage beside Gracie Fields, Dinah Shore, Jack Benny, Max Miller, Tommy Trinder, and Frankie Howerd.

Donald Peers will sing a new number, "Raise Your Voices."

3.30 **GRACIE FIELDS** with the Keynotes and Billy Ternent and his Orchestra.

Sing As We Go (Gracie Fields), I'll String Along With You (Keynotes), Johnny Comes Marching Home (Orchestra), The Biggest Aspidistra in the World (Gracie Fields), Portrait of a Flirt (Orchestra), The Lord's Prayer (Gracie Fields), Crazy Rhythm (Keynotes), Sally (Orchestra), Loch Lomond (Gracie Fields), My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean (Gracie Fields), Just a Song at Twilight (Gracie Fields), Auld Lang Syne (Gracie Fields).

Compère: Bernard Braden.

★ Our Gracie

IN any list of top draws, Gracie Fields is inevitably in the top drawer. The radio show she recently recorded for Radio Luxembourg has proved such a hit that it is now playing throughout the Commonwealth and starts in the States in February. So, soon, Gracie will be back to do another series. At the same time, she is likely to do some TV films. Despite the forthcoming Beveridge Report, I doubt if the B.B.C. will be in the sponsored TV field early enough to bid for it!