

REVIEW

Bless 'Em All

St David's Hall, Cardiff
Rating: ★★★★★

WHEN South Wales entertainment institution Stan Stennett, 82, created a wartime variety show specifically for his age bracket we thought it only fair to send a reviewer who would appreciate what was on offer.

Into the breach stepped former Echo arts reviewer Jon Holliday, 79...

Nostalgia was in the air at the matinee show with the variety bill Bless 'Em All.

Well-loved songs of war-time Britain and the austerity of the years that followed victory rang out, conjuring up memories of such favourites as Vera Lynn, Ann Shelton and Gracie Fields.

Introducing this loosely-structured lookback was Welsh favourite Stan Stennett, still spry at 82, establishing immediate rapport as he recalled some of the many famous showbiz entertainers he has worked with over the past 60 years in pantomime, summer shows radio and TV – just what his 800-plus audience had come to hear, after all most of them joined with him in retaining vivid memories of that era.

Song and dance man Johnny Tudor was in fine form with his impressions of Tom Jones, Frankie Vaughan, Elvis Presley and the rock'n'roll years.

Johnny Dallas raised the laughs with his droll dead-pan patter and later even more so with his bare-knuckle stories as Mrs Piddlewig.

The excellent bass baritone voice of Peter Lewis was most effective in hits from Oklahoma, and Fiddler On The Roof while a wonderful selection of Paul Robeson songs was spot on.

Shelli Dawn, Mandy Starr and Emma Lee Wagner showed, in their contrasting styles, how to put over a number with their audience needing little encouragement to join in while The June Dubois Dancers added a real touch of

glamour with their eye-catching costumes and polished routines.

It was a warm-hearted song-filled three-hour show from homegrown talent with lots of sentiment and laughs along the way and, unsurprisingly, Stan

Stennett and Co are already booked to return.

Despite a number of rumours to the contrary, traditional variety is definitely not dead.

Bless 'Em All proves it.

