



Government
of South Australia

**2005 Adelaide Film Festival: Introduction of *I Told You I Was Ill: Spike
Milligan***

Greater Union Cinemas, Hindley Street

Tuesday, 22 February 2005

**Hon Mike Rann MP
Premier of South Australia
Minister for Economic Development
Minister for Social Inclusion
Minister for the Arts
Minister for Volunteers**

- Director of the Adelaide Film Festival, Katrina Sedgwick
- Director of tonight's film, Cathy Henkel
- Producer, Jeff Canin
- Members of the Milligan family...Laura, Desmond and Georgia
- Ladies and gentlemen

In the dance halls of Catford...where my family is from and near where I was born...

...in the battle of El Alamein and in the battle of Monte Cassino, where my father also served...

...Goon humour was born.

And Spike Milligan...an Irish Anglo-Indian Cockney from the working class of South London...I respond to for these reasons like a brother, or a rowdy cousin, perhaps...one that needs watching.

In poverty...in lack of education...in demeaning early employment...in the grubbiest corners of show business and the horrors of war...he paid his dues.

And his reward...and ours...was a comedy as memorable, exact, deranged and English as that of Lewis Carroll or John Cleese...

...an imagination as anarchic as the Marx Brothers or WC Fields or Buster Keaton...

...and, in its way, as Irish as Samuel Beckett or Brendan Behan.

To squeeze laughter out of tragedy...as he did in even the book titles of *Hitler: My Part In His Downfall* and *Mussolini: His Part In My Downfall*...is perhaps the greatest evidence of the jagged wonder of the human mind under stress.

...along, of course, with jazz trumpeting, comic drawing, dirty limericks and standup improvisation...in which Spike also excelled.

It's no accident, I think, that Alfred Hitchcock, Noel Coward, Charles Chaplin, Michael Caine, Terence Stamp, Gary Oldman, Bob Hope and Terence Alan Milligan...also known as Spike...all hailed from South London...

...from the working classes, the so-called "lower orders", in which so much native talent is routinely stifled by the cruel divisions and unusual punishments of the British system of class...and the well-known Pom habit of forming an orderly queue.

And only a few of us...like me and Spike...for probably accidental reasons...truly survive it.

You'll see in this film a talent that almost never was...

...whose upbringing was a minefield that on countless occasions nearly snuffed him out.

And it's a measure of the greatness of Australia...and the goodness of Australia...that he and his parents and brother chose to spend so much of their time around Woy Woy...

...among the democratic decency that England in his youth so pointlessly and heartlessly denied him.

This is the story of a great man...

...the Picasso of clowning...

...the Schoenberg of logical sequentiality...

...the Aristophanes of the British Empire...

...the Gogol of Whitehall...

...the Laurence Sterne of autobiography...

...the inspiration of Peter Cook and the Monty Pythons...and Tom Stoppard and Bill Leak and Billy Connolly...

...the zany uncle we all wish had visited us in childhood...

...a man who battled depression and suicidal longings...and the mounting lunacies of war and politics and intellectual fashion and medical ignorance in the 20th century...

...a man who opened the door...with courage and frankness...to the unsleeping demon of clinical depression in our time...

...a man who gave us his pure music of the heart...

...his visions and revisions...

...his endless mud-wrestle with the English language...

...his hilarious deconstructions of the absurd world we live in...

...and his laughter...which has no end.

Ladies and gentlemen.

It's my great pleasure to join you in watching a film made possible through the Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund...*I Told You I Was Ill: Spike Milligan.*