

# Ralph McTell – a British music legend who oozes class

Ralph McTell's song, The Streets of London, was massive as I was growing up and my wife's first shop-bought LP was of Ralph McTell songs, including the classic hit which became a rallying call against homelessness, touching lives throughout the world.

We've never forgotten the words and there are millions more like us in Britain and around the world.

McTell is currently touring Britain, celebrating 50 years since the song was released. and the fans are coming out in their thousands.

The Brunton audience paid their respects to the award-winner by packing the intimate Musselburgh theatre which proved an ideal venue for the Kent-born musician.

He sang songs old and new and even lifted the lid on his life and family in a typically understated way which endeared the performer to the audience.

Anecdotes included his father being a truck driver in the North Africa campaign during the Second World War and he told of being on the footplate as his grandfather drove the Brighton Belle, a famous steam train which sped between London's Victoria and the seaside resort of Brighton.

He also opened his heart about his mother, who died in her 90s, and alluded to politics, particularly those relating to

Yugoslavia, a previously war-torn country he undoubtedly has a soft spot for.

The soft-spoken artist, who has worked alongside Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone, spoke about the catalyst for some of his many self-penned songs, including a broken romance which prompted a trip to Europe, and he told of busking in Paris.

All the stories were relayed with feeling and many acted as a feeder for his 95 minute set which drew a standing ovation.

The artist may be 74 but he can still hold an audience with his asides and dry humour.

There is nothing flash about McTell. The stage set was two microphones a seat, a table, three guitars and a glass of water.

The lights suddenly dimmed and he strode on stage unannounced from the wings in a denim shirt, dark trousers and red trainers.

It was almost as if McTell was popping into your front room for a cup of tea.

However, it was a privilege to be in the audience to enjoy the light and shade in his voice and his impeccable guitar playing.

McTell hosts a 75th birthday concert at the Royal Festival Hall in December. It's a far bigger arena than The Brunton but it would be no surprise if this consummate but unassuming professional had the audience under his spell.

We enjoyed the experience and we bought a CD – Hill of Beans, his first album of originals since 2010 – to remember our close encounter with a British musical legend.