

# Graceful and tasteful

By IFAN PAYNE

THE economics of touring these days are such that it is all too often unfeasible for a soloist to make a decent living and also perform with front-rank side men at the same time.

The financial gain to the soloist is often a musical loss to the audience, as is the case all too often with Stephane Grappelli who

## REVIEWS

appeared at St David's Hall on Saturday evening.

After half a century of playing jazz Grappelli is now a violinist who needs performers of the calibre of Gary Burton, George Shearing, Ponty and Dave Grisman alongside to

push him to play at his best.

It is no accident that *It Don't Mean a Thing* on the *Shearing Reunion* album is one of the more exciting of Grappelli tracks. Nor should it be surprising that his love of bright, stringy-tones accompaniment should generate some of his very best performances of recent years on the *Live*

album with Grisman and his Dawg Music group. (The sound of this Warner Bros album is also magnificent, by the way. A real gem, this.)

At St David's Hall Grappelli was as graceful and tasteful in his playing as ever. He is a performer who has spent his life exploring the potential of a rather limited range of numbers, but each year his performances of old favourites like *Honey-suckle Rose* and *Sweet Georgia Brown* are re-worked with new twists to his improvisation.

This was also the case with his performance on Saturday, not only of these two classics, but of Sonny Rollins's *Pent-up House*.

Grappelli's playing sounds effortless and easy with his elegant bow arm and economy of position work it also looks it. But a glance at the polished collection of transcription shows that this effortless-ness hides considerable skill.

That skill was very much in evidence during the extended solo in *I Get A Kick Out of You*.

But even when idling along in neutral, Stephane Grappelli is a master musician and gratifying entertainment.