

FIRST NIGHT REVIEW

Pop: Jimmy Webb at Cadogan Hall, SW1

The songwriter's tribute to singer-guitarist Glen Campbell, a fascinating mixture of video clips and genial anecdotes, rolled back the years

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This was an evening when two old friends were reunited to look back on their careers, but only one performer, in fact, walked out on to the stage. Glen Campbell, 80 and stricken with Alzheimer's, has already made his farewell tour and lives in a care home near Nashville.

Jimmy Webb's tribute, a fascinating mixture of video clips and genial anecdotes, rolled back the years and reminded us that Campbell, besides being a rhinestone cowboy, was an accomplished session guitarist who turned up on countless recordings, from Ike & Tina Turner's *River Deep – Mountain High* to Frank Sinatra's *Strangers in the Night* and the Monkees' *I'm a Believer*.

Sitting at the piano, as a large screen displayed footage and photographs, Webb – a cool-looking 70 – wove his own extraordinary story into the narrative. Surely it is only in the corniest of Hollywood biopics that a boy working on the family farm in Oklahoma would hear Campbell on the radio and pray that, one day, the star might sing his songs too.

Life can be stranger than fiction. The youngster eventually managed to find a berth at Motown, of all places, and, later, *By the Time I Get to Phoenix*, *Wichita Lineman* and *Galveston* became Campbell anthems. Webb, a laid-back raconteur who has never claimed to be much of a singer, negotiated them comfortably enough, sometimes with the help of a backing track, while gently making fun of his inability to hit every note. He is philosophical enough too to joke that only half of his fans actually like that rhapsodic period piece *MacArthur Park*.

The previous time I saw him, a decade or more ago, he was playing to a half-empty house at Ronnie Scott's. The turn-out at Cadogan Hall was much more impressive, and you sensed that Webb, who was too sophisticated a musician to attract the critical respect he deserved in the rebellious 1960s, enjoyed having such an attentive audience. He has more than earned it.

Touring to September 21