

An Evening to Remember:

The 1994 Heidenstam Memorial Trust and Hall of Fame Awards

Ken "Leo" Rosa, D. C.

March 17, 1994. After the most severe and disgusting New York winter in my memory I was overjoyed as I flew Virgin Atlantic to attend the third annual Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Trust and Hall of Fame Awards which would take place in England on 19 March 1994. The honorees were scheduled to be the legendary Steve Reeves of the USA as well as Mr. and Mrs. Bert Loveday and Mrs. Zena Platten of England. Slightly ahead of schedule I arrived at Heathrow where the weather was much better than that which I had left behind. There's just something special about the reunions in England that makes one look forward to them each year.

March 19th. I was looking forward to the nighttime gathering but in the early afternoon my body was demanding a workout. So I went to Maximum's Gym to pump up my anatomy so I'd be raring to go at the dinner later. That evening, we had the entire Commonwealth Room to ourselves with open bar giving a choice from water to the black gold from the tap called Guinness Stout. There was wonderful Steve Reeves memorabilia in abundance to be auctioned off. And nice soft music during dinner.

The Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Committee—Dr. Ian McQueen, Dr. Tom Temperley, Clifford Leaistre, Colin Norris and Malcolm Whyatt—carefully plan the annual proceedings which are normally flawless. It was anticipated that John Grimek, Reg Park, Dave Webster, and Ian McQueen would be present. Unfortunately, they were all unable to attend, and their presence was sorely missed. And yet we had the largest gathering so far. There were at least 166 people present including the incredible feminine muscle of 1990 NABBA world champion Bernice Price. The very personable Dave and Rosemary Gentle were seated next to me, and Dave told some entertaining Steve Reeves stories. The number of adoring Italian fans present gave testimony to the fact that Steve Reeves' popularity is scarcely diminished in Italy where he was Hercules in the movies four decades ago.

Colin Norris spoke briefly to open the ceremonies, then turned the microphone over to Malcolm Whyatt who acknowledged the sad loss of Jack Delinger, Ed Jubinville, Jon Paul Sigmarrsson, John Pegler, John Farrow and Rueb Martin during the past year. A posthumous award to Rueb Martin is planned in 1995. Malcolm then informed the audience that "we have a surprise. I have no idea what the gentleman is going to say. He's a very good friend of the Trust and he's asked if he could say a few words to you all. He's Dr. Ken Leo Rosa from America." I had been secretly planning a surprise for

Malcolm since the previous year and now was my moment to reveal it. I took the microphone and said, "it's a pleasure to be back here again this year. It all seems like yesterday. But it wasn't yesterday. It was 1947 when I was at the Sig Klein show in New York City. Steve Reeves was Mr. America. I remember seeing Steve standing in the back of the auditorium wearing a trench coat and he had the widest shoulders anybody had ever seen and the narrowest waist anybody had ever seen. I also remember 1965 when I wrote to Oscar Heidenstam to ask him if he would allow me to enter the 1965 NABBA Mr. Universe contest. Oscar wrote me back, and he said, 'you know, we have standards here (there was a burst of laughter), so would you submit a photograph?' So I did, whereupon he wrote back telling me that I was welcome to enter. Oscar Heidenstam is very dear to me. He allowed me to enter the 1965 NABBA Mr. Universe where I found the judging to be the fairest I had ever seen. I was treated better there than I had ever been in my own country. That contest was the high point of my bodybuilding career. Since then I have attended the first, second, and now the third Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Trust gatherings here. I've also gotten to know Malcolm Whyatt and I appreciate this gentleman perhaps more than he realizes. Because of that I want to surprise Malcolm with something right now." I held it high and there was a round of applause as the photographers and television people drew in close to capture the moment. Last year I had given Malcolm a brochure containing photographs of several of the works of superlative physique sculptor Adolfo Robles, and Malcolm, in an off hand remark indicated which of the statues he liked the best. I had met Adolfo in Madrid the year I was training for the 1965 NABBA Mr. Universe, and so when I visited him in Florida I asked him to give me the statue which Malcolm liked. Adolfo did, and it was that Sandow-like statue which I presented to Malcolm, saying, "Malcolm, it's yours."

There was a great burst of applause and cheering as Malcolm arose to accept the gift. He appeared to be quite moved. "I really didn't know this was going to happen," he said. "The only thing I can say is I used to look like that statue. . . ." The room filled with good-natured laughter as Malcolm added, "many years ago." "Thank you very much for that kindness" he continued. "This Trust can not be run without everybody."

Then Malcolm, with a sort of sheepish expression, continued. "And this is a total coincidence. We give special awards for certain people each year. And it just happens (laughter started

throughout the room) that the recipient is Ken Leo Rosa.” Now the laughter and applause was tremendous. “Leo Rosa has been most generous to the Trust and so without further ado as a small token of appreciation I present him with an Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Trust memento, keepsake.” Now it was my turn to be totally surprised. I now was speechless, as happy as I could be and yet just a little sad when I thought about how I had always been treated so well by the English while bodybuilders were being victimized in the 1950s by a feud back in the USA. But this evening was marvelous enough to help wipe away any remaining bitter memories of so long ago.

The Trust also recognizes the accomplishments of outstanding people in other fields of athletic and artistic endeavors, and in keeping with that laudable policy a special award was presented to vivacious Mrs. Zena Platten, Malcolm informed us that she has been teaching and helping people in gymnastics for 69 years. She has been a national coach, a ladies national judge, and the honorary vice-president of the London Gymnastic Federation in 1991. She was doing gymnastics in 1925 and is still coaching youngsters in gymnastics. As the award was presented amid thunderous applause one had to be amazed and impressed by the slim, erect, still youthful appearance of this incredible woman.

Dr. Tom Temperley was now called upon to introduce the next honoree who was the 1939 Mr. Britain, a physical training instructor in the RAF during World War Two, the British weightlifting team coach after the war, and an outstanding squash player well into his 70’s. Tom said, “Bert, this is your Life” as he presented the award to the fit and distinguished looking Loveday, who thanked the Trustees and all those present.

And now the eagerly anticipated main event as Malcolm Whyan said, “Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Steve Reeves and his fiancée, Deborah.” The applause was deafening. Malcolm contin-

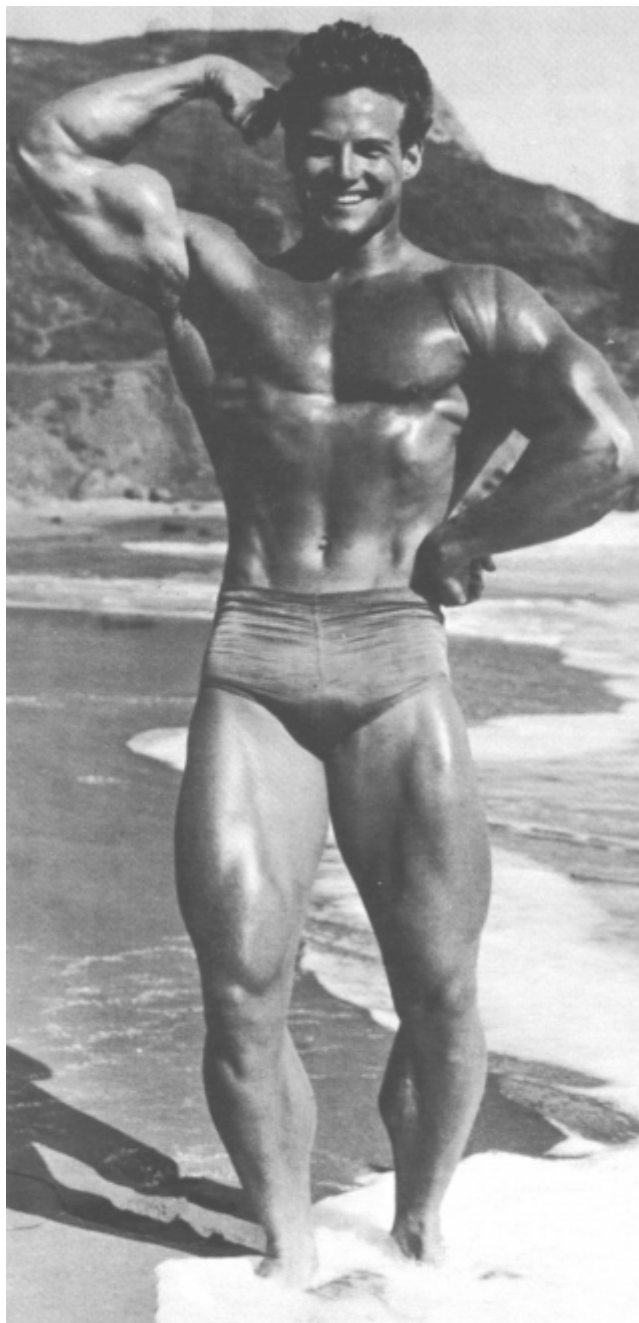
ued, “I’m going to speak from the heart. Everybody here knows as much about the legendary Steve Reeves as I do. He’s inspired thousands upon thousands in this country and abroad. John Grimek, Reg Park, and Steve Reeves helped to form bodybuilding as we know it. They were twenty years ahead of their time. Steve was a natural who courted fame and fortune wherever he went. Steve Reeves is one of a kind. Steve, this is your first public appearance in the U.K.

since you won the NABBA Mr. Universe in 1950 and now you’ve honored us with your presence. Thank you very much.”

A standing ovation as Steve Reeves acknowledged Malcolm’s words. People seemed to want to climb over tables to get Reeves’ autograph. Dr. Tom Temperley presented the award inducting Steve Reeves into the Hall of Fame. After more applause Steve Reeves was handed the microphone and spoke glowingly about his late friend Oscar Heidenstam. He recalled when they both went to France in 1948 to enter the Mr. World which Reeves won. The inspiring Reeves personality was evident, as he thanked everybody to another standing ovation. The photographers took what seemed to be millions of shots and then a line of almost everybody in the room formed so that the faithful could all have a chance to get the coveted Steve Reeves autograph,

What a fabulous evening. After the official proceedings were over many of us wended our way to the posh lounge where I, of course, gravitated to the gorgeous grand piano. As I played song after song Colin Norris and his good-looking daughters sang along. All of this brought more people around the piano to make requests, joining in until the wee hours of the morning.

Each year that I travel to England I look forward to seeing now-familiar faces and to making new friends. The Oscar Heidenstam Memorial Trust is a very special cause in remembrance of a special person and attendance produces an exceptional *good time feeling*.



TAKEN IN 1947 BY RUSS WARNER, THIS PHOTO OF STEVE REEVES PROVIDES GRAPHIC EVIDENCE OF HIS UNPARALLELED SYMMETRY.

PHOTO: TODD-MCLEAN COLLECTION