

Six pages
of insightCaught
in the
Act

JONI MITCHELL: stony

situation the freshness and potential of the band could be perceived, and while they approach their music with such an imaginative, cavalier spirit they'll surely be justly rewarded.

They launched into their set with a lively performance of "Fiddlers Three," and maintained this spirited feel through Brian Golbey's exuberant fiddle playing, though the mix wasn't always perfect and the fiddle occasionally intruded on Allan Taylor's vocals. Taylor's excellent songs generally benefit from having a more weighty backing, when impact is given to his most dramatic songs like "The King And The Jester" and "The Proud And Noble Savage."

Stage presentation is loose, and when the cajun influence was incorporated fully and Golbey given full rein, there were signs that the ice was thawing.

They'll improve further when Taylor has written more material specifically for the group, for at the moment much of it is what he did as a solo artist, and they would do well to use Jon Gillespie's keyboard work to create a tighter, more

rhythmic sound rather than as additional and unnecessary decoration. But already they have so much to commend them that should make their forthcoming album on Chrysalis something special.

Earlier there had been pleasant, if not earth-shattering, sets from Andy Roberts and Gay and Terry Woods. Gay and Terry's material is strong, but the sound they make as a duo is a bit too thin. — COLIN IRWIN.

JAN HAMMER

NEW YORK: Released from the uncontrolled frenzy of the latter day Mahavishu Orchestra, Jan Hammer has now formed his own quartet and is making tentative steps up the ladder to becoming a keyboard hero in the jazz/rock idiom, though thankfully he has avoided the star trappings of George Duke and his rainbow synthesiser.

Hammer played New York's Bottom Line last week and veered between the staccato frenzy of improvised jazz boogie

and the more arranged approach of his Atlantic album, "The First Seven Days," which took up the greater part of his performance.

The group features violin, bass and drums and it was drummer Tony Smith who stood out whenever Hammer ducked away behind his mound of electronic keyboard instruments. Smith whipped up a proverbial storm whenever he was given the opportunity, but held down a backbeat well enough to ensure the soloists never took off higher than they might have wanted.

This was a good thing, for there were times when it seemed that Hammer's need to display technique would be detrimental to the evening's entertainment.

The new material, based loosely around a concept of God creating the earth, sky, wind etc., had a more melodic feel once the introductory parts were over. Not unnaturally the concept lends itself to peculiar science fiction soundtrack stuff which, apart from some boomingly spectacular bass harmonies, struck me as noise rather than music.

Once the piece was under way, though, matters improved and there were some pleasant, delicate exchanges between Hammer and his violinist which built to scorching climaxes as Smith's drums put on pressure from behind.

The absence of guitar left Hammer with a huge burden, but he carried off the evening well enough, despite the cool audience, who didn't request an encore. — CHRIS CHARLESWORTH.

BILLY SWAN

NEW YORK: With such a long career behind him, it seemed odd that Billy Swan was debating his first-ever band at the Other End last week, but that was the case. Swan, a slow drawer from the South, is not a man to rush things and he's spent six months working on this band, playing the backwoods, before deciding the time was ready to crack the city.

Swan, of course, had a monster hit just over a year ago, with "I Can Help." At the time he was playing guitar with his old buddy Kris Kristofferson, and was in no hurry to quit this steady job on account of one hit single.

After all, many years ago, Swan had written another hit — "Lover Please," recorded by Clyde McPhatter, and his fortunes didn't spiral all that dramatically at the time.

It's just possible he may have taken too long in assembling this aggregation, for the Other End wasn't sold out on opening night and there were four more nights — two shows a night — to go, but the time has certainly been put to good use. The five piece unit are tight, raunchy and possess a cutting edge that is essential to Swan's lazy, Sun Records inspired style of rock and roll.

They are, of course, a direct descendant from the typical American bar band, a genre that could be likened to England's pub rock fraternity. Billy Swan doesn't go on stage to teach music but to grit his teeth and play fairly simple rock and roll, carefully acknowledging the past but maintaining a more fashionable laid-back guise. He looks a bit like a cowboy and this helps enormously.

The sound at the Bottom Line was pretty awful. Rarely could you hear the solitary horn player, and the pianist was equally out of things. Sometimes he turned to his Hammond and produced the spiralling organ chords that held together Swan's first hit, "I Can Help," the song that began the show.

His material came from a variety of sources, country and rock, but I'd hazard a guess that Elvis Presley is Swan's real hero. Apart from his slowed down version of "Don't Be Cruel" — so slow that you always come in too soon if you try to sing along — he also cranked out a splendid version of "Shake, Rattle And Roll," first recorded by Haley but later, and more proficiently, done by Elvis.

The band is not yet ready for the concert stage but, with this vitality and slightly amateurish feel, they're an excellent club act. Swan knows the fable of the tortoise and the hare. He knows he's the tortoise and he also knows who won the race. — CHRIS CHARLESWORTH.

Joni sends 'em to sleep

ST. LOUIS: In the age of love beads and flowers, Joni Mitchell was the composer, Collins and Baez the singers. A decade later it seems that little has changed, if one is to judge by Joni Mitchell's stony recital at Kiel Auditorium's Convention Hall.

The evening began on the same dead note on which it ended, for she was preceded on stage by the L.A. Express minus Tom Scott, who has taken his leave. Evidently Scott's departure has severely damaged the band's esprit de corps, for their set was dreadfully wet. Sax man David Luell may resemble Scott physically, but as a musician he doesn't come close.

Drummer John Guerin, a.k.a. Mitchell's boyfriend (at last count), has taken over as spokesman for the group and seemed to be attempting to do the same in the musical area. However, Guerin's delayed-action style is too slow to make him all that interesting, and certainly disqualifies him as a good Krupa rip-off, the end to which he seems to be aspiring. Bassist Max Bennett and keyboardist Victor Feldman (replacing Larry Nash) were no help either, leaving guitarist Robben Ford as the only member really putting out. Despite a few misplaced notes, Ford added enough flash to save the set from becoming a complete waste of time.

Mitchell opened with an acceptable rendering of "Help Me" but the remainder of her concert was mostly cold. When the band joined her midway through the show, during the title song from her new album, "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns," they added a little life, again thanks to Robben Ford. The accent there is on "little," however. Joni made only the barest acknowledgement of her audience and as a result of this monotonous format, one began to notice the sameness of her songs. The repetition of imagery and note progressions grew more and more boring — until people actually began falling asleep! And walking out.

While Mitchell's voice had the fullness and ringing purity that have developed with the years of professional use, it was about as expressive as a telephone dial tone. Even her expertise on acoustic guitar and piano could not dispel the prevailing stiffness.

Oddly, a "brand new song" — an acoustic piece which had "talk to me" as the most-often repeated lyric — was the best sound of the evening. During it, she regained some of the feeling and engaging wistfulness she has exhibited in the past. "In France They Kiss On The Main Street," from her new album, was almost as well done, and constituted the band's finest moment. But these were only fleeting instances, for her voice never really found its way through the maze of her own lyrics, illuminating though they be. —PATTI DEWING.

LOUIS KILLEN

I MISSED Louis Killen first time round. I'd set out to see him at folk clubs on a couple of occasions but he'd been unable to appear, and then he'd gone off to America leaving behind an image in the mind that steadily grew to legendary proportions.

There must be many addicts of the folk revival with a similar blind reverence of the man who had tested the extent of that reverence for the first time during the last six weeks. Kill-

len, now singing with his American wife Sally, has been doing a hectic tour of folk clubs. When I finally caught up with him on one of the last dates of the tour — at South-West London's Palais de Folk on Sunday — Killen not only matched (but exceeded) my unreasonably inflated expectations of him.

Killen, a small, voluble Georgie, confirmed his place amongst the prime elite of folk revival singers. Any fears that his time in the States may have dulled his powers were dispelled as, despite the strain of the heavy tour schedule, he proved a master of the monumental ballad. He's a supreme stylist, and there's no real replacement on the British scene — the nearest to him in vocal approach is Tony Rose.

Where Killen's brilliance really comes to the fore is in his harmonies. The chorus of "White Cockade" is a good example, as Sally holds the note and Louis' voice swoops and weaves around her in electrifying fashion, while they can completely transform a hackneyed song like "Pleasant And Delightful."

Sally is a fair singer in her own right, if a bit abrasive (though that may have been down to the effect of concentrated gassing), and she turned in a good performance of "Charming Molly," which they followed with another beautiful Copper Family song, "The Shepherd In The Downs."

Curiously the audience was a bit sparse, and there was little atmosphere. But artistically it was a classic night, making one realise the extent of the loss incurred by the British club scene when Killen emigrated to America. — COLIN IRWIN.

KEVIN COYNE

TAMPERE, FINLAND. With outside temperatures at -20c, Kevin Coyne was going to have to work hard to warm the hearts of the Finnish fans who crowded the somewhat sterile local technical college.

Coyne came on stage alone, wearing an ill-fitting jacket and trousers that looked as though they hadn't been off his body since the Finnish tour began. Playing acoustic guitar, he gave a pleasant rendition of "Blame It On The Night," and then introduced his band — Zoot Money (piano), Steve Thompson (bass), Peter Wolf (drums) and Andy Summers (guitar), a lineup reeking of class and experience.

Indeed, the sound was perfect as Kevin sloped around the stage going through "Strange Locomotion," "Sunday Morning Sunrise," and "Games, Games, Games," among others. The highlight was "Shangri-la" which featured some beautiful guitar work from Summers. Coyne produced a little bit of everything from reggae to a ten-minute version of "English Country Garden" spotlighting the evergreen Zoot Money. From there to "Easy Rider" and "Eastbourne Ladies." Towards the end Coyne gave a nice version of "Knockin' On Heaven's Door."

Throughout, Coyne looked like Joe Cocker's twin brother from his almost identical stage movements, beer gut, dishevelled appearance and many similarities in vocal gymnastics. He took frequent slugs on a beer can and tried some humour from time to time, involving a stage broom, but this was unfunny. The Finns were kind enough to laugh, but it could only have been out of politeness.

At no point did Kevin Coyne set the place alight, but the audience response was warm, and as an encore Coyne and Summers produced the best numbers of the night, "You Got To Live Your Life." Summers played acoustic guitar and Coyne sang this number beautifully — a nice change from the

well-controlled wall of sound that had gone before.

Kevin Coyne would be more at home in a pub or smoke-filled club, but as Tampere has only synthetic ale houses and concert halls I must be grateful for what I did see. — MARTIN EASTERBROOK.

BEATLES FILMS

A CAPACITY 500-plus crowd packed the Southport Arts Centre last Wednesday for the second of a series of Rockumentaries, this one being subtitled *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away*.

The man in question was Alan Williams, one-time manager of the Fab Four in the early days when, in fact, they were five, and it was his recollections and anecdotes that provided the focal point of the evening.

Although Williams' implied claims that he was responsible for the group's initial style are open to question, his reminiscences had the authority of being first-hand, even when exaggerated through constant repetition over the years.

In addition to Williams' talk, two films made at the height of Beatlemania in 1963 made fascinating viewing. The Mersey Sound, a BBC TV documentary, had the lads talking about their ambitions — Ringo wanted a ladies' hairdressing business, while Paul thought he and John would probably "end up song-writing" — plus in-concert film of them and other Liverpool groups of the period, including the Undertakers.

Some of the interviewees would probably cringe now at their comments — like Merseybeat magazine's Bill Harry, who delivers a scathing attack on the kids with "long scruffy hair."

This desire for respectability was even more evident in the other film, "And The World Listened" — a typical civic public relations job made for Liverpool Corporation.

The whole Merseybeat phenomenon was presented in a healthy "youth club" atmosphere, along with football and the ever-present Spinners strumming their way around dockland. It was far from the sweating cellar clubs and drunken journeys in the back of vans that was the reality, a reality that came over in Williams' contribution.

The film featured some shots of the Searchers in the recording studio, and some stock Pathe newsfilm of the Beatles that has cropped up time and time again in various documentaries of the period.

The Beatles' music came in the form of live performances of three songs — "Let It Be," "I've Just Seen A Face" and "A Little Help From My Friends" — from Pete Rimmer (guitar and vocals) and Mick Rimmer on bass, and the legendary tapes of the Beatles in Hamburg's Star Club that are of surprisingly good quality considering they were made on primitive equipment under far from perfect conditions.

All in all, it was a feast for Beatle addicts. — MIKE EVANS

SLIM CHANCE

SO there we were, standing on our seats, swaying in the aisles, clapping our hands and joining in the chorus of "Side By Side," while on stage Ronnie Lane's Slim Chance added their own verses accompanied only by Charlie Hart's barroom piano. We were all — band and audience — having a damn good time.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, sums up Slim Chance's musical outlook. It's a brand of good, essential uncomplicated songs performed by a group of musicians determined to entertain their audience and have a

good time themselves in the process.

Unlike some bands who goof around onstage and also goof up the music, Slim Chance have taken care of the basics by ensuring that their songs are performed with a casual polish and sound playing ability. They are, indeed, as they showed at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on Sunday, a group of versatile musicians, with Hart sometimes deserting his piano to take up a fiddle, and Steve Simpson switching between mandolin, guitar and fiddle.

In these days of keyboard players who need one hand to play the instrument and another to adjust knobs and switches (well, they've got to do something with their left hands, haven't they?) it was refreshing to see Hart use both his hands for actually hitting the keys of his acoustic piano in a lovely style that bubbles and rolls along like a rippling mountain stream.

But some of the evening's best moments came when he and Simpson duetted on fiddles in a couple of numbers, notably in a fine version of "The Poacher," a classically underrated song, and on "Anniversary." Vocally, Ronnie himself has improved tremendously, while still keeping his deceptively lazy style and his voice was always on top of a perfectly mixed sound. And underneath it all Colin Davey's drums and Brian Belshaw's bass gently nudged the band along, never overpowering the frontmen, yet never to be found lacking.

Standouts of the evening were numerous: the aforementioned "Poacher," a sturdy "How Come," their new single "Don't Try And Change My Mind" and another potential single in "One For The Road," and finally a couple of minutes nostalgia with "All Or Nothing."

When I went to see Slim Chance on Sunday I certainly did not have a barrel of money — but I left feeling like a million dollars. — ESDALE MACLEAN.

CAJUN MOON

SADLY, Cajun Moon's prestigious London concert at the Commonwealth Institute, Kensington good-humoured fell slightly flat. Hopes have been high for Moon since their completely successful debut on the Steeleye Span tour, and a good gig at the climax of their first headlining tour would have really contributed to a major breakthrough.

But there were plenty of empty spaces in the theatre, while the atmosphere was decidedly frosty. Valiantly as they tried the band never really broke it down. There was cause then for disappointment, if not dispondency. Even in this

Natalie: no dum-dum

NEW YORK: Whenever I get depressed about the wave of disco-soul plastication, something nice happens. This time it was Nat "King" Cole's daughter, Natalie. "When I do something, I don't mess around," as she said at one point in her recent Beacn Theater takeover. And as a sardine-full house scrooned its you happily out, a woman near me put it another way. "How bad is baad?"

Baadad enough. Inevitably, Cole sang a lot of stuff from her first Capitol release, "Inseparable." I found the album rather blah. But live, she gave a hip, musician-heavy audience the rush the disco-stuff can't give — nor for that matter, Betty Davis' manipulative heavy funk. It wasn't so much her

voice, which is good but no better than many out there, as what she did with it. Which was to use a style that widened early Aretha Franklin with pure gospel of several vintage and hints of jazz singers from Lady Day through Ella to tear the place down with a high-octane blend of strut-your-stuff, intelligence and humour.

Mainline soul by a singer with brains who doesn't see it as dum-dum music and enriches it with a sense of its own tradition. Chaka Khan does something similar. Natalie Cole is more mainstream than Chaka Khan — but she also can boogie harder. And she's funny with K. Her parody of "Che Sara' Sara," crossing Doris Day with Sly Stone, was a riot, and her version of dad's "L-

O-V-E" was both affectionate and amused. Of course, there's more to any act than the singer. Plenty of discoplat embeds a good lead in slurr. Natalie Cole backed herself heavy, with a bouncy female duo and a two-keyboard, bass, drums, congas band that matched her own get-down stylishness. The bill-openers, Crown Heights Affair, had the same spirit — a heavy but good humoured boogie coming off trumpet sax-trombones front-line riffs echoing back to the great big bands, and these despatched Inkspots quartet harmonies that have been creeping back lately. After this kind of young, shout-for-joy evening I can almost forgive 1975 for Barry White. — JOHN STORM ROBERTS