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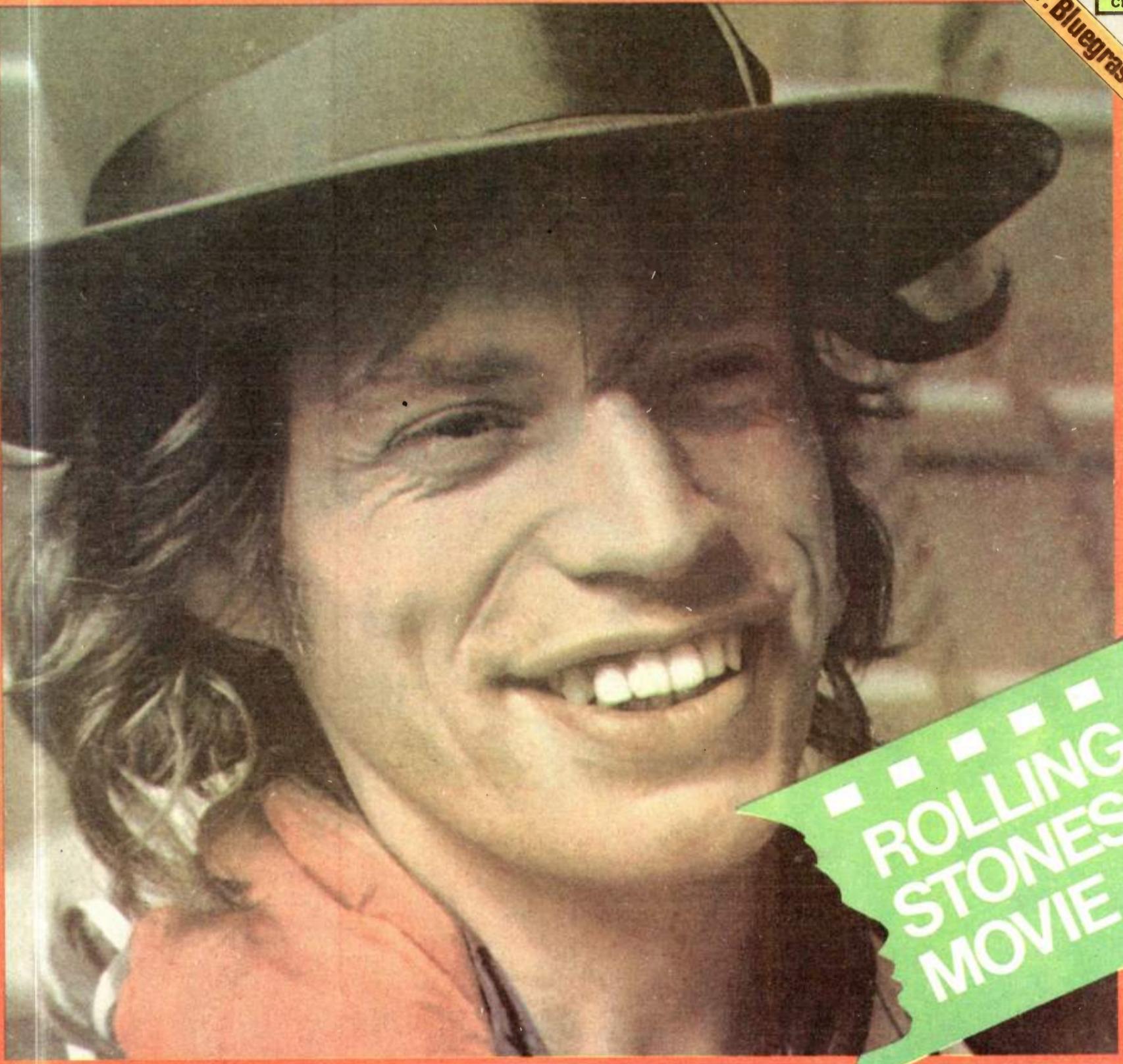
LOCAL SCENES: ROCK'S NEXT TREND

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PERFORMANCES

Ronnie Spector & The Ronettes
The Continental Baths
New York, N.Y.

By ALAN BETROCK

Ever since Ronnie Spector and the Ronettes folded up shop in the late sixties, the music world has been awaiting their return. But despite one shot efforts every couple of years on A&M and Apple, Ronnie never was free enough to go out on the road and bring her music to the public, granting her the opportunity to grow professionally step by step as time went by. Last year, after a long layoff, she went out on her own doing small clubs and various oldies gigs, highlighted by a huge ovation at Madison Square Gardens' Rock and Roll Revival Show. But Ronnie deserves better than that—most of the oldies groups are pale imitations of their hit records, and of themselves, and the audience often loudly rebels at anything new. Forty-year old overweight men in toupees, singing doo-wop is not what rock 'n' roll is all about....

Ronnie's current return to live dates and recording is marred by a lack of direction. Her career choices fall into three basic categories: (1): Pigeonholed as an oldies act appealing to the nostalgia buffs; (2): As a campy nightclub act catering to the more tasteful Vegas and TV variety shows; and (3): As a singer breaking new ground with the current record buyers, and in the Top 40 charts. Her show at the Continental Baths was a clear example of the meandering combination she is currently pursuing.

The management of The Baths adores the Spector sound, and their patrons are devotees of the kind of camp which hurled Bette Midler to the top. Perhaps that's what Ronnie has in mind, for why else choose the Baths for her NY press debut? Certainly she wasn't interested in reaching the new masses, for the \$10 a seat price tag drew only the invited press and Baths regulars. And the intro by Murray the K recalled only painfully out of date nostalgic remembrances of the old Brooklyn Fox days....

But directionless or not, it was Ronnie Spector in the flesh, and that was enough. Dressed in a sheer see-thru gown, she had trouble keeping her top half contained in its place—a bit stolen from one of Bette's old routines perhaps??? She was backed by two new Ronettes (Chip Fields and Denise Edwards) garbed in matching white dresses, and a three piece band who looked about as bored as could be. The group opened with the old Motown favorite "Get Ready," and Ronnie immediately took hold of the crowd. She was nervous, and her vocal phrasing and stage movement suffered, but as time went on things loosened up. "Baby I Love You" followed and the crowd warmed up perceptibly. "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" was pure Vegas, and drew a strong response. The group pulled it all together for "Best Part of Breaking Up," and by now Ronnie's nervousness was all gone. She was loose, dancing and slinking across stage, often wandering into the first few rows for admiring kisses. When she sang "Walking in the Rain," it was near perfect, blessed with strong feeling, powerful lead vocals, and full backup harmonies. One sometimes wished that the sound could be fuller and more overpowering—if Ronnie was pursuing a new audience, perhaps a mellotron would be employed. Certainly the bassist and guitarist did little but read their charts—there was



Whatever this lady is selling, there should be no shortage of buyers!

little sincerity or added help from their quarter. Only the drummer applied some creative power and punch.

Throughout the show, there was a *deja-vu* aspect to the performance. It was an act—a well rehearsed, slick set, which I found just a bit too planned. I suppose a scene such as this was enacted hundreds of times in various go-go bars throughout the USA in the late sixties and early seventies. In fact, if it wasn't for Ronnie's outstanding vocals and professional sex appeal, the whole thing could have been lifted from a Friday night bar show in Anytown, USA. Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" reinforced this aspect even more, as each backup Ronette came up front to do some solo dancing in a typically 60's go-go style, with a characteristically "funky" backing.

Ronnie's new Buddah single, "I Wish I Never Saw the Sunshine" drew immediate response, proving that Ronnie can break new ground and still retain her own distinctiveness. The song was polished and together, shining thru with a vitality that most of the others really lacked. "Be My Baby" had the audience on its feet from the outset, and powerful

drumming offered strong incentive to the girls' bump 'n' grind routine. By now it was obvious to all that this was Ronnie Spector's night. "My first love has always been performing and entertaining," she told me before the show, and that charismatic love touched everyone there that night.

"This is the way I really feel about life," declared Ronnie as she closed the set with "Love Train," complete with audience participation onstage for the choruses. Then they were gone, but the audience howled for more. The "act" wasn't prepared with anything more, so they did "Be My Baby" again to riotous cheers.

Ronnie Spector is at the most important crossroads of her illustrious career. It would be a blessing if she could get back into the charts and establish herself as a viable entity. Certainly her voice and stage presence are as outstanding as ever, and her success could do much to give the rest of our female singers a well needed kick in the pants. It's gonna be a hard climb, especially without the benefit of Phil's production or connections, but with some sincere encouragement and strong guidance, she may well be on top again soon.

Joni Mitchell
Ellis Auditorium
Memphis, Tennessee

By STEVE RHEA

Joni Mitchell has finally accepted stardom and all the craziness that goes with it. During her Memphis appearance she still revealed her female submissiveness on the songs that required it, but she also displayed the more aggressive side that has recently emerged in her music.

The first set was uneven and inferior to the music that came later. Looking tan in her green outfit and floppy hat, she quickly ran through "This Flight Tonight" and "You Turn Me On I'm A Radio." She loosened up and put some feeling into "Free Man In Paris," "Same Situation" and "Just Like This Train." But then, abandoning her guitar, she led the band in an upbeat perversion of "Rainy Night House" and a funky "Woodstock." Her aggressive treatment of these old songs just didn't make it; she stood in front of the microphone like a Holiday Inn lounge singer, making nervous attempts at hand gestures. Through the entire set she had not said a word to the audience.

After a 10-minute break Ms. Mitchell returned by herself and treated us to one of the most beautiful performances I have ever seen. She was open and easy with the audience, and they reacted with adoration.

Joni improvised and giggled some on "Big Yellow Taxi" and then spoke to the crowd for the first time, discussing our perceptions of God, and how they affect relationships with others. She could have talked about her laundry and it would have worked. Her sensitivity and personal communication are why people love her, and for the first time all evening she showed that side of herself.

After "People's Parties" it was obvious that she needed no support from any band. She was funny. She was beautiful. By this time she had set aside her hat, and her gold hair was sparkling, almost like a Roman candle.

After a special request from a girl in the audience, Joni turned to her dulcimer and performed "A Case Of You," followed by a stunning version of "All I Want."

Back on guitar, she did "For The Roses" which, she explained, was inspired by a talented friend who had decided not to try to make it as a performer—to race for the roses.

Joni accompanied herself on piano for "Blue," alone and bathed in a blue spotlight. Then Joni picked up her guitar, the L.A. Express moved in behind her, and they began the third portion of the concert, performing material from her new album, *Court and Spark*.

Here's where Joni's aggressiveness worked. "Troubled Child," "Help Me," "Car On A Hill" and "Down To You" were energetic and enjoyable, and the audience was ready for it. "Both Sides Now" was a pleasant surprise, done more in Judy Collins' fashion than the original Mitchell.

All lights went red for "Raised On Robbery," and the volume and energy hit a peak. It seemed a little out of place to be rocking so hard after keeping the lid on all night, but it was fun.

Joni returned for the encore with "The Last Time I Saw Richard," which was perhaps an attempted explanation to fans who might be puzzled by all this rock and roll from such a sensitive hand. Further explanation was provided with her second encore, the old Annie Ross jazz number, "Twisted." "Annie Ross was pretty crazy" she said. "We are all a little crazy. We are made that way by our schools, our churches, our parents."

Joni Mitchell no longer lets her craziness keep her down. There is a time for emotion and a time for assertiveness. And there is no escaping the inherent contradiction. Joni's a romantic, but she's also a strong woman looking out for herself.

Left End
House of Bud
Cleveland, Ohio

By ANASTASIA PANTSOS

If yer gonna be outrageous, outrage us! Emerging from Youngstown, Ohio in the wake of such slogans as "We hate people so much they deserve to hear us" and "The kickass punks are back; leave your weak stomachs at home," Left End arrived upon the Cleveland bar scene and left me disappointed.

I caught the group at the House of Bud one Saturday night and my complaints about the group's relative blandness were met by manager Steve Friedman with "people expect you to be disgusting all the time when you have a reputation like we do, and some nights you just don't feel like it."

Well, kid, this is show biz, and one of the rules of show biz is, you do it whether you feel like it or not. And it's not enough, if you're advertising yourselves as the most obnoxious band in town, that singer Dennis Sesonsky, cutely referred to as "Dennis T. Menass" for stage purposes, struts on in silver sequined tights and spends most of the set lunging around with his hand down the front of his pants.

The rest of the band are straight men for Dennis, much as the Stooges are Iggy's. Dennis cops a couple of Iggy moves like climbing up his guitarist's back, but you know he wouldn't dare hurt himself! "Gimme Danger" is NOT his song. Instead he's "Spoiled Rotten," which brings to mind only a middle-class adolescent.

Besides some of Iggy's less threatening moves, Left End borrows some Alice Cooper tricks like throwing money to the crowd (Manager Friedman protests, all innocence, "We've got a complete scrapbook on Alice Cooper and I don't remember them doing anything like that.") and those hoarse, frantic raps of Black Oak Arkansas's Jim Dandy though Dennis's favorite topic is drunkenness, not horniness.

After an hour's worth of prancing, Dennis left the stage and reentered dressed as a devil, in red tights, leotard and satin cap with horns, a pitchfork stuck through his crotch. Finally, he climaxed the set-long tug-of-war he'd been having with a rope leaded offstage by dragging on a man dressed in a gorilla suit who pretended to beat him up and then hurled a pie in his face. Dennis, enraged, "beat up" the gorilla. End of show. The audience applauded politely and went home.

Left End's album, *Spoiled Rotten* on Polydor, will be out shortly, putting them in direct competition with every other band in the world and not just the Cleveland bar babies. It'll be interesting to see if they can make it big with their blend of waning trends: glitter, punk-rock, violence and heavy metal music. This band doesn't seem to know what to be. They simply try out everything that's been a moneymaker for someone, within the bounds of hard rock. "Ya gotta have a gimmick" is their theme (or five or six gimmicks) and they come up with nonsensical non sequiturs like being punks in silver sequined trousers or delivering blatantly theatrical Alice Cooper style assaults with the earthy Jim Dandy approach. Left End may look a bit outrageous to some people here, but what will they look like in New York City?