

Brings out as many people as a pop festival

Bobby Bland's band has the big city sound

By TERRY KELLY

Twenty thousand people were at Olympia Stadium in Detroit Saturday night. About 30 were white. I could give most of their names. They were there to see a show headlined by Isaac Hayes of "Hot Buttered Soul" fame and the Bobby Blue Bland. Bobby is coming to Toronto.

He sings the urban blues with a rough brassy band, perhaps too close to R & B or Soul for some blues purists but there doesn't seem to be a line to draw.

He is 40 years old. Those who came to see him weren't only the young. It was easy, that audience; joy and good time rising, the urban stink and Saturday night.

I was worried about being there. I'd seen films of the Detroit riots and smashed store fronts on the stale streets near our hotel. The riot had flooded down Woodward Avenue at one point leaving some small buildings hollow and cracked in the heart of that large city.

We were not ignored, but not pointedly noticed. There was a quiet stare in some faces. A guy asked me to change a dollar.

"Sorry. I don't have any money." So he asked someone else to change a dollar.

A few of the acts before Bobby had the same oiled steps and gestures that I'd first seen on the Dick Clark show. Then came Dee Dee Warwick, heavy and glistening in a sparkling gown with a man nearby shouting "Lay it in there. Come on baby. Tie it up mama."

Then came the Funk a Dallics. They were the act before Bobby and they began to chant while moving onto the stage, thrusting with Afro rhythms. There was a cheer of appreciation. People were getting excited.

Their leader, a man with a top knot and wearing a flowing cape, gave a speech.

"You probably sayin' to yourself. What's wrong with those fools on stage? They full a LSD or been smokin' a reefer. Well I'm going to tell you where its all at. I'm higher 'n' a MOTHERFUCKER."

Now there was a current — yelling, shouting, screaming. The leader jumped off stage. He took off his cape and danced into the crowd. He was nude. The power was cut. The only lights were the smokey jaundiced house lights. Many, many hired police, who I noticed carried guns, shone flashlights and he was surrounded by jerking, excited, screaming, laughing people and moved back toward the stage.

Somehow while he was surrounded he put on a jock strap. The Funk a Dallics, most of whom were down to loin cloths, danced for a while longer, then left.

It was time for Bobby. The spotlights were still off, only the dull house lights colored everything with smokey ash.

The show had been going non-stop since eight o'clock and it was not 11. The band set up. Joe Scott, trumpet player-leader who has been with him over 10 years walked on. They did two "tunes" for his girl singer; then he came on, introduced by the formula: "Thank you ladies and gentlemen. And NOW here's the MAN, Mr. Bobby Blue Bland."

People murmured, cried. There was a stronger even excitement, more knowledge and recognition in it than the

frenetic clapping for the Funk a Dallics. Bobby has been making records since 1954. He's known.

He is a big, powerful-soft man and his ban has a rough, textured sound. It has a shine and it sounded like the city, a big sound. He opened with "Turn on your Love Light" then "The Feelin is Gone".

"Sing it baby, sing it," I heard.

"Play the song; play the song."

"Sing it Bobby" a man yelled.

His band was tight, following him; the rythm heavy, yet right on, building to a flat brass crack of sound, a deep wedge. He did "Stormy Monday."

"The eagle flies on Friday,

Saturday I go out to play,

Sunday I go to Church,

I get down on my knees and pray."

He knelt down and held his hand out. I thought it theatrical and contrived. Everyone else loved it, an easy slow and brief gesture.

He got up and walked over to the guitar player, putting his hand on his shoulder during the solo. "Take your time son, Take your time." People were yelling; "All right brother, All right."

When I went to his motel later I had that vacant particularly American big city feeling those kind of blues have.

It was a nice motel but it was a motel. The atmosphere was as bare and unchanging as the rooms, as transient



Bobby Bland

and institutional as the pale green walls; rooms that were empty every few days.

Bobby was going to Atlanta the next day, to another motel, along 700 miles of interstate highway. That's a long way between gigs.

Now it might not bother some people but that motel had the same feeling of wide distance and midnights and Coke cans and restaurants and travelling to sameness that I get in the United States. I asked Bobby about travelling.

"It hasn't got to me yet," he said. "After a while its a job. I'm from Memphis but I live on the road really. I just want to cut out the one-nighters, but it's hard to get the money. With a show you need \$10,000."

I don't know. Bobby has friends in every town and a Cadillac. It is a grind.

"I do all the drinkin'," he said. "If the chauffeur goin' to stay up all night partyin' like I do, ain't no use havin' one." Bobby, unlike some blues performers, has a reputation of never being a no-show.

He has gentle charm with a deep soft-voice. His skin looks as soft and deep as his voice — smooth. The nail on his baby finger is long and polished.

Dick Flohil who is helping to bring Bobby to Toronto said that he might have a hard time with his audience here. There wouldn't be that many blacks.

"That's mellow." Bobby answered. "If they listen it doesn't matter." Bobby has played the Filmores and he says he likes an "audience that comes to LISTEN, to get the STORY." He likes clubs better than "cabarets where they stand on the tables and drink and somebody says somethin' to somebody else's old lady and pow wow."

"What did you feel about following the Funk a Dallics?"

"I didn't see their show. I was backstage. You can get naked and it don't matter with me. I'm gonna come on and do what I'm gonna do anyway. I used to do that stuff. You don't believe I'm a man? thing." He paused. "Yes, I did all that stuff. I'm tired of that."

Now they know who he is. "They listen to all of it. It's all Bobby." He can lighten up a bit now. "Screaming", I been doin' for years. I'm 40 now. No way I can do it like that now. The vocal chords change."

He hasn't had the exposure in Canada someone like B.B. King has. I remember when you used to be able to buy some of his albums here but now they're hard to get. He has had some problems with bad management.

"When you're young and from the country and lookin' for a chance to sing, you'll sign your life away, you're so glad to record. Even if you get treated fairly decent."

Bobby hasn't been to Europe and the only way he'll go is by ship. He doesn't fly. "There ain't nothin' that urgent." This will be the second time he's been to Canada. He was in Vancouver once before.

If making it means acceptance by a large white as well as a black audience then Bobby hasn't. But in Detroit with its factories and flat wide streets and in most of the United States he is the kind of draw that can bring out almost as many people as the pop festival in one night.

He's been doing it for a long time.

Three Dog Might plays a good variety

By STEVE GELLER

With the pop music output of today having a musical tendency which leans towards specific, highly specialized fields, Three Dog Might have challenged the newly established trends with a sound that is neither heavy or light, soft or hard.

The reason for their instant success since their birth in 1968 lies with the uniqueness in both their structure and material as well as their always spritely delivery. Never before has there been a white lead trio displaying the wide vocal range and syncopated stage activity characteristic of Three Dog Might, while at the same time being accompanied by a fine instrumental quartet.

Although the individuals of Three Dog Might were in constant contact with one another at most times during the juvenile stages of their careers, the ways and means by which the present musical entity evolved were purely coincidental.

Danny Hutton, who originally got started in the music business as a record producer, impressed record company executives more with his voice than with his producing ability. Their interest in him as a singer led to his first North American hit, *Roses and Rainbows*, which topped the charts in 1965.

While recording for MGM, Danny was backed up on a single entitled "Funny How Love Can Be" by a fellow who went under the name of Chuck Rondell. When on tour with Sonny and Cher, in 1966, Hutton came into contact with a group called The Enemies which featured Cory Wells as its lead singer.

For Hutton and The Enemies it was the renewing of a friendship for it was Danny Hutton who had produced the group's hit single, "Hey Joe" while he was still a record producer back in 1964.

After the tour, Hutton and The Enemies went their own separate ways and didn't meet again until after Cory Wells left his group when its personalities began to clash. Wells formed the short-lived Cory Wells Blues Band in 1967 and when it failed he linked up with Danny Hutton, intent upon creating another group.

At the same time Hutton and Wells had joined up, a young singer by the name of Chuck Megron had signed with Reb Foster Associates, a California company. Since the age of 15, Chuck sang with soul musicians and, absorbing their blues influence, backed up soul

groups on demos and recording sessions.

He found out that Danny and Cory were looking for a third vocalist and arranged to meet the two singers. He was immediately recognized by Hutton as the Chuck Rondell who had backed him up on a single a few years back. Going under his real name of Chuck Megron, he was accepted into the group and the trio of Three Dog Might came into being.

Dog Might's dynamic vocal quality. From the defunct Cory Wells Blues Band, Joe Sherman was selected to play bass. Jim Greenspoon, formerly of the East Side Kids, was chosen as organist while lead guitarist Mike Alsup left the Family Scandal to join the group. The final member to be added was Floyd Sneed, the former drummer for Jose Feliciano.

The group made its debut at the Whiskey A Go Go and catered to the Los Angeles crowds that continuously flocked to see them before their long, head-lining contract ran out.

After two successful albums, Three Dog Might have recently released their third album, *Captured Live At the Forum* (Dunhill S50068), which was recorded live at the Los Angeles Forum in front of over 18,000 ardent fans.

The wide variety of their music becomes apparent in this latest album. They range from J.R. Robertson's country gospel rock, *Chest Fever*, to the soulful singing of Megron who executes with

feeling, *Try a Little Tenderness* and *Feeling Alright*.

Three Dog Might seem to be capitalizing on the works of today's great music writers, incorporating their material into a style found only in the new vocally agile group. On the live album is *Heaven is in Your Mind*, a tune written by Stevie Winwood, along with a Lennon-McCartney song entitled *It's for You*.

All their previous hit singles are also flawlessly presented Harry Nilson's *One*, and Laura Myro's quick-tempoed *Eli's Coming* are performed with the harmony and solo efforts, live, just as well as on the studio-released single. The same holds true for *Hair's Easy* to

be *Hard and Nobody*, which was the first single ever released by Three Dog Might.

Captured Live at the Forum is a typical example of why the appeal of Three Dog Might has caught on so readily in North America. As this new group displays an effort to combat the everyday trend in music, three competent lead singers offer not only three different solo styles but three different duet combinations as well as a fully-harmonized trio sound with an instrumental quartet backing. Although it took them several years to finally get together, Three Dog Might should remain a successful unique group for many years to come.

Around town...

HAWKS NEST: This week, on Saturday, Feb. 10 only, The Stooges, from Michigan will play two sets. The club doors open at 8 p.m. Future happenings include Frost on Feb. 22 and a special concert by Taj Mahal the following week.

THE ELECTRIC CIRCUS: The Circus hosts *Two Minute Hate* for the entire weekend, Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. They're one of the hottest local groups around. Their great sound as well as the total environment atmosphere should make the Electric Circus the number one spot this weekend.

RIVERBOAT: The Riverboat again presents a fine blues personality in the form of John Hammond who will be there until Feb. 16. Following him for one week only will be Tim Hardin.

GLOBAL VILLAGE: Platform is operating on Friday night featuring Jazz and Dixieland jams from 10 p.m. until dawn. On Saturday Feb. 14 at 8:30 p.m., Layton, Penelope, and Hawks, three of Canada's leading poets, will conduct a night of lyrical poems. — S.G.

this weekend

HITCHCOCK