

Rita MacNeil keeps the atmosphere alive

By BETH CUMMING

RITA MACNEIL AND HER band gave their all last Sunday at the Rebecca Cohn auditorium. Tickets sold out quickly and so an additional late night show was added.

The concert setting with its purple and blue lighting and controlled sound quality had a more polished feel than the taverns I've seen them perform in. Along with the background noise of clinking bottles and people's

comings and goings, some of the cosy atmosphere of the tavern was lost. On the other hand, the audience had an opportunity to hear all the words and, of course, Rita MacNeil's great strong voice.

Opening the show was a relatively new 'old favourite' "Part of the Mystery", which had everyone clapping. She made use of the large stage, strolling to the far corners with a hand-held microphone.

The band was "all slicked up"

in what looked like matching tuxes. In spite of the new, flashy look, Rita still took her shoes off and told funny stories between songs. It was the familiar touches that established the rapport that she shares with her audiences.

She has written songs about the lives of people she's known, her home and about being on the road. A favourite ballad, "Grandmother" had room enough for Scott McMillan to let the guitar really sing. "Neon City" was backed up during the chorus with

the whole band singing 'Lovers become strangers, strangers become lost' in synchronised phrasing. On newer numbers like "Louisiana Rain", "You're a Loser When It Come To Love" and "Last Train to Tokyo", John Alphonse on percussion came out of the background. Ralph Dillon provided interesting keyboards throughout.

The group has been travelling with Rita as far as Japan and Expo in Vancouver and lately work together as a very tight unit.

They demonstrated their versatility playing honky tonk C & W, bluesy rock and pop (and still looked like they were enjoying themselves.)

Most of the repertoire is original material but the encore was a rousing version of "Midnight Special" and "Bring Your Loving Special" with an added verse: 'You Know I'll always sing for you, Anytime you want me to...' The show ended with Rita, hands outstretched and the audience on its feet clapping.

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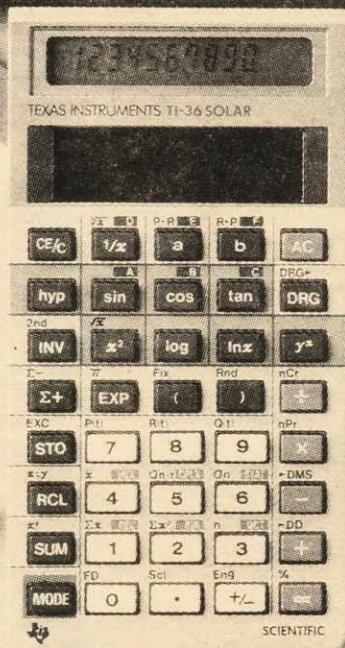
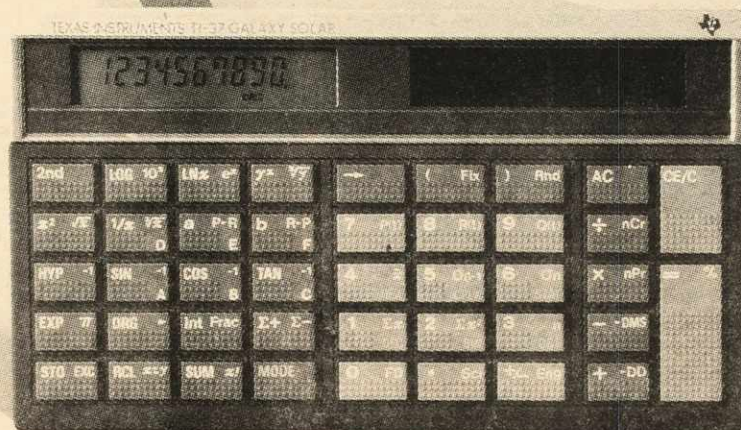
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