



Etta James, in town this week, doesn't sing blues, she lives them.

At the Club Bluenote

Etta James on top of R&B revival

HOWARD GOLDSTEIN and STEVEN HACKER

Musicians often say that before you can really play the blues you first have to live them, so rooted in life experience is this musical form. There is no doubt that singer Etta James fulfills this necessary criterion.

Born the illegitimate child of a teenaged black mother and an Italian father (which accounts for her light skin colour and natural red hair), James is well-acquainted with hardship. Raised by foster parents, she had her first recording session at 15. Six years later, after a series of hits, she was a heroin addict. Already an accomplished singer by her late teens, she grew up fast.

This week Etta James returned to Toronto for a rare appearance--her first in over five years--at Club Bluenote. In her first set of the week, it was obvious that James' reputation as a powerful performer is well-

deserved. Aply backed by the house band, George Oliver and Gangbuster, James went through a well-varied programme with great energy. The instant rapport between this ten-piece band and James, who had never performed with them before, was impressive.

The band, which is primarily a rhythm and blues unit, was to find a great challenge in the versatile repertoire of James. Very early in the set, she departed from the expected with a faithful version of Hank Williams' 'Your Cheatin' Heart'. Most noted for growling strong vocals, she showed that she also is, quite surprisingly capable of handling more sensitive material. This was particularly evident during her jazz ballad medley, which included tunes made popular during her work in the 1960s as one of the leading acts on the then-thriving Chess record label.

But what attracted the sizable, mostly older crowd to the popular

club on a Monday night was her well-known ability to belt out classic R and B tunes with unparalleled authority. These people were not to be disappointed though. Midway through her show, James introduced a medley of Otis Redding classics which proved to be among the evening's highpoints (in a show which was without any lowpoints). Its culmination, in a rocking version of 'I Can't Turn You Loose', which quickly filled the dance floor, gave testimony to the enduring vitality of R and B.

Interest in Rhythm and Blues, while it might never have really died, is experiencing a resurgence. This revival has led to the re-opening of the Bluenote, Toronto's R and B hotspot in the Sixties, attracting names as big as Stevie Wonder. While Etta James, (like the popularity of R and B) may have had ups and downs, this week she is on top, a tribute to the persevering blues art.

Guitarist Andrew Gill speaks

England's Gang of Four: Middle-class, white, tongues in cheeks

DAVID KELLY

Recently this *Excalibur* reporter talked to Andrew Gill, guitarist, vocalist and half the writing team for England's Gang of Four. This is the result.

Excalibur: How's it going, Andrew?
Andrew: It's okay. We have been doing some good gigs and have been selling out.

Excal: Have you been getting some good responses from your audiences?

Andrew: Yes, it's been good, actually. We haven't been to Canada in two years now. We were not quite sure how it would be but the response has been quite good.

Excal: As a group, who are you directing your music to? Are you going for a wide market appeal or are you aiming for a select audience?

Andrew: I never look at it in terms of aiming for a market or even a particular musical genre, in terms of

music which is inaccessible, avant-garde or experimental, whatever you want to call it, and then, the other side is middle of the road, commercial music. Those kind of polarities don't bother us much. We are happy to use elements of either kind of thing.

But on the other hand, we are interested in our songs reaching the mass area. It makes more sense. Like our song "I Love a Man in Uniform": Its irony and sharpness make more sense and is wittier when it rubs shoulders with a standard top 40 song.

Excal: What do you want from an audience when you perform a concert? Do you want them to listen or to start dancing?

Andrew: I think it's good when they enjoy themselves. I don't mind playing in a sit down place. You get a very attentive audience then. They watch closely and listen carefully

but, on the other hand, it's good when people get into the flow and dance.

Excal: The army and the military is a constant theme in your music, from "Armalite Rifle, He'd Send in the Army", to your latest song, "I Love a Man in Uniform". Why is the military so important to your music?

Andrew: It crops up, now and then, yes. In a sense, "I Love a Man in Uniform" is similar to "He'd Send in the Army" because it's exploring the male inadequacy feeling, that need to latch onto something which gives a role for the man. "Uniform" and "He'd send in the Army" are inherently very similar in that respect, exploring the relationship in that area. Sort of like his relation-

ship with his wife. He respects authority and wants authority.

Excal: What about capitalism and the consumer society?

Andrew: It is difficult to avoid, really.

Excal: I heard your next album would be done in the United States.

Andrew: Yes, that is a strong possibility--quite likely.

Excal: Are there any advantages to doing your work in the States, instead of Britain?

Andrew: There are some advantages and I think when you are doing a record it is best to get away from your normal domestic circumstances. Get away from it. The last

time we worked in the country so now we are thinking of working in the city.

Excal: Why did you call yourself the Gang of Four?

Andrew: When we formed, the Gang of Four was happening in China. It was sort of tongue in cheek. Four white middle-class kids after these Chinese revolutionaries. It also showed we had a serious intent and a kind of nature to effect alterations in our cultural sphere.

Excal: Do you want a high profile as a group or as individuals in a group? Do you want low-keyed profiles as individuals?

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