

# 'Bluesologist' Heron speaks for the ghetto

By JAMES FLAGAL

*And through it all, we closed our eyes, didn't we? At 33 and a third going down for the third time, under the third degree, watching a third of our fellow Americans breaking their backs for third class citizenship, taking a third less home on payday, because of dollars inflation, while thirty years after segregation was tried and banished from the nation, here it comes again, discriminating.*

**G**il Scott-Heron's lyrics revolve around the struggle of the poor and oppressed. Ironically though, when accompanied by Heron's musical compositions, their tale of hardship comes out sounding almost sweet. But his message remains as powerful as ever.

Heron arrived at the Bamboo on his August 31 concert date, over an hour and a half after he was supposed to be on stage. After being detained for over four hours by immigration officials, he joked about his entire ordeal at customs. "It seems the only two forms of ID they would accept," he said mockingly, "was my mother and father."

Then Heron warmed up with a Stevie Wonder copy tune—"Don't Drive Drunk." But Heron changed the lyrics and tune a bit, and it went something like this: "Drinking and driving don't mix, so I've giving up driving for good." A little bit of comic relief does wonders for an impatient audience.



Heron has just returned from a European tour where he continued to try and raise the profile of his music. Evidently, his efforts were to no avail. He complained that his records are nowhere in Europe, and those stores which do carry his albums categorize them under miscellaneous. It's not much better here, Heron explained. "For some reason stores have put me in the jazz section. So we looked up jazz and found out that meant miscellaneous too."

Perhaps miscellaneous is the only term which can properly describe Heron's music—either that or eclectic. While one composition may be right in the rap groove, his next song on the same album will possess the elements of classic blues. According to Heron, "I feel free to use the blues, to use be-bop, to use whatever form I need to get the message across." And Gil Scott-Heron certainly does that.

But at the same time he maintains a musical integrity in concert which is better than most. Heron has assembled a diversified and versatile band which can crank out the blues as well as it can get down to the rhythms of funk.

"All that Jazz," Heron's first number, displayed the fine tenor

saxophone of Ron Holloway, replacing the flute of Brian Jackson which deserted Heron's band in 1979. Holloway added a new dimension to the old '70s hits, and often redefined many of these songs.

The drumming of Steve Walker along with the "Secretary of Entertainment" himself, Robert Gordon on bass, gave each song solid foundations. Walker and Jordan were constantly feeding off one another, displaying that intimate relationship which every great drummer and bassist should share. And then there was the percussion section—Tony Dunckinson on timbali and the "Doctor" Barnett Williams on a variety of bongos and related instruments.

For Heron, with each song comes an explanation. He discussed how America has gone through every season, starting off with spring at the time of Independence. But now, Heron says, psychologically, politically, and philosophically, there is only one season in America today—winter. So started off the chilling description of hypocrisy in the United States found in Heron's "Winter in America."

Heron told of Frank Rizzo, a mayor of Philadelphia who started a

campaign to encourage people to voluntarily give up their handguns. In the ghetto, Heron continues, only two guns were turned in to the police, and the bureaucrats were confused as to why the program was such a failure in these areas. When they asked a man in the ghetto, he bluntly replied: "I'll give up my handgun when the police give up theirs." Then the keyboards of Kim Jordan blasted, introducing Heron's "Blue Collar Blues," and another tune describing how the rights of the underclass are abused.

Heron often seems like the spokesman for those in the ghetto, relating the hardships and oppression which they must face daily. Yet his music is a paradox: while he talks about the dangers of nuclear power plants in "Shut 'em down," a smile stays constantly on his face as he pours out the lyrics. Perhaps that's the essence of hope in Heron's compositions—the music itself.

## BACKSTAGE

By JAMES FLAGAL and PAT ANDERSON

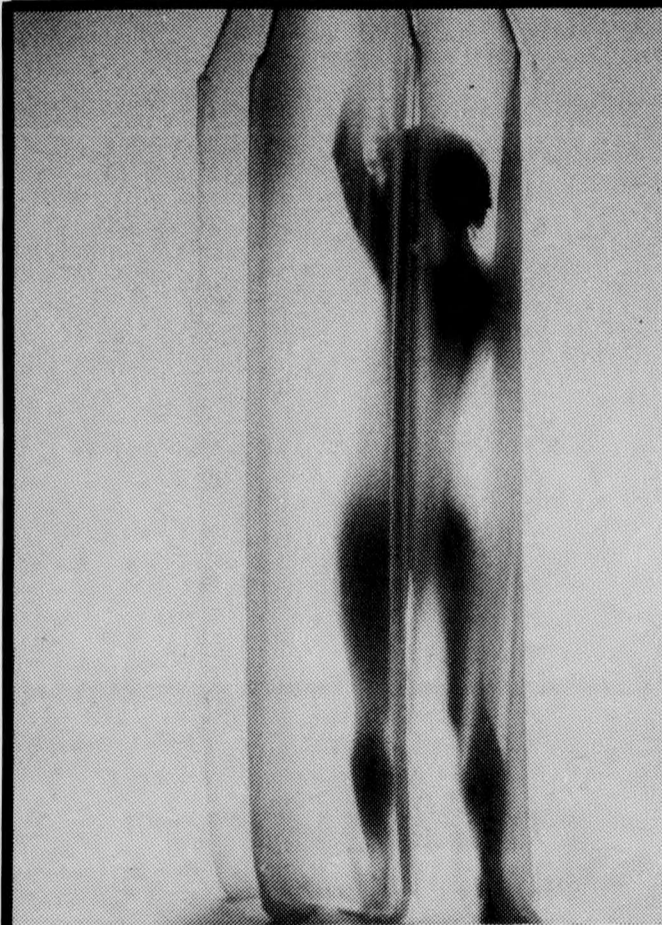
**Excal:** Why do you call yourself a "bluesologist"?

**Gil Scott-Heron:** I mean that's what I do. I grew up around a bunch of blues musicians, and I studied what they did.

**Excal:** Are you coming from the point of old blues musicians, like say Robert Johnson?

**G.S.H.:** No, I'm talking about the ones who were playing when I came

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MOMIX

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