

# Reviewer stunned by her voice Carter's concert catharsizes

Betty Carter  
at the Palms Cafe 10010 - 102 St.  
Shows at 9:00 p.m.  
until Feb. 7

Review by Michael Skeet

This is the new age, and we're all terribly concerned for our health. So few people were smoking Tuesday night. The Palms is a well-ventilated establishment, as well. Nevertheless, there was a smoky room in Betty Carter's voice Tuesday, and it washed over us and made us all very, very glad to be where we were.

Betty Carter has performed in Edmonton before. Not having seen that performance, it is impossible for me to review Tuesday's show in a calm and rational manner. Quite simply, I was stunned. I spent the whole intermission

grasping at superlatives, attempting to find a way to express on a printed page the way in which Betty Carter's voice affected me.

Just as there is no way to tell from her recordings just how incredible a live performance by Betty Carter can be, so there is no manner of written expression that can adequately describe what is happening at the Palms this week. All I can do is give a bare outline, enthuse a bit, show you a picture (or two), and encourage you to hear and see her for yourself.

Carter has with her a trio consisting of Greg Bandy, drums; Curtis Lundy, bass; and Khalid Moss, piano. For several hours on Tuesday, opening night, Carter sang and scatted her way through a number of standards, newer compositions, and her own work. The audience at no time numbered more than



photo Ray Giguere

Betty Carter doesn't just sing—she moves from ecstasy to sweet sorrow to Heaven with her indescribable voice.



Betty Carter lives through the agony, but oh, how sweet it is. Under the palms are drummer Greg Bandy and bassist Curtis Lundy.

photo Ray Giguere

45, but the size of the crowd mattered to no one, with the possible exception of Mr. David Kilvert, who will have to pay Carter at the end of the week.

Dave can relax. When word of this experience gets around, the staff at the Palms may have to turn people away with threats of violence. The weekend shows ought to be something else.

The only way I can adequately describe Betty Carter's voice is to suggest that it is not unlike a well-aged Scotch - its power is masked by its incredible smoothness. To borrow a phrase, there are eleven indispensable instruments in jazz, and Betty Carter's voice is eight of them. That voice Tuesday night went up and down and all around and did not falter, showed no sign of strain.

A number of highlights should be mentioned. On the upbeat, Carter did the jumpin'est version of *Seems Like Old Times* I ever heard. She scatted her way through *My Favorite Things* in a fashion that might give Richard Rogers, or Julie Andrews, or Maria Von Trapp, apoplexy.

This was no lullaby - Carter stood right in there and defiantly shouted it out: "I don't feel so bad!"

In a slower tempo, she didn't merely sing *Moonlight in Vermont* - she lived it, and we lived it through her. She didn't just sing about Billie Holiday - she was Lady Day, singing about herself from outside herself in a voice that was pure heartbreak.

And her version of *Open the Door!*

I can honestly say that I have never been affected by any single performance the way that particular song affected me. To attempt to describe it further would be to cheapen it somehow.

There isn't much more that I can say about Betty Carter, except to encourage anybody who cares at all about music to see the show. You don't have to be a jazz aficionado to appreciate this voice; a liking for music and a desire to be entertained will more than suffice. The cover charge is a bit stiff on the weekend, but the result is well worth the investment.

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by Michael Dennis Skeet

Stephen Bishop  
*Red Cab To Manhattan*  
(Warner XBS 3473)

Stephen Bishop writes and sings *Mayonaise Music* - pop for North American WASPS. And I gotta confess - I really like what he does, almost against my better judgement.

*Red Cab to Manhattan* is a nice, well-produced, relatively-unpretentious album. Indeed, if Bishop has a saving grace, it's that he refuses to take himself too seriously. This is a good thing, because he could never get away with something as stupid as *Sex Kittens Go To College* otherwise.

The majority of the songs on *Red Cab* are story-songs about that never-ending conflict between romantic men and women who are either hard-hearted or easily led astray or who just don't understand. Perhaps I should amend that first paragraph or read 'pop for North American WASP males.' I really can't find anything on this album for women to identify with.

On the other hand, I easily fall into the WASP-male category, and am as such very susceptible to Bishop's pop roman-

ticism. Like the hero of the title song, I also have my phases wherein the answer to every emotional dilemma can be found in an old Frank Capra film. And those gently-rollicking tunes are certainly catchy, even if they aren't particularly memorable.

Stephen Bishop is no Cole Porter, but *Red Cab To Manhattan* is still a pleasant enough way to spend a mellow afternoon when I really oughta be in class.

Tom Robinson  
*Sector 27*  
(I.R.S. SP 70013)

Despite its origins as the soundtrack of rebellion, rock 'n' roll has a limited capacity for absorbing messages. This isn't to suggest that a veritable horde of musicians, well-meaning or otherwise, hasn't attempted throughout the last 20 years to use the music as a vehicle for promoting or denigrating some cause or other. It is simply to say that few such attempts are successful.

One of the artists who has managed to create a recording that is both listenable and inspiring is Tom Robinson. A gay who came out of the closet early in his career, Robinson is also one of the founders of Rock Against Racism, and his 1978 debut with *Power in the*

*Darkness* was powerful in more ways than one. The songs, particularly those recorded live, had an anthem-like quality to them, and *Glad to be Gay* signalled a new period of assertiveness for British homosexuals.

Even someone as totally committed as Tom Robinson can't buck the odds, though, and the follow-up to *Power* wasn't nearly as successful, either artistically or commercially. The Tom Robinson Band broke up, and Robinson ended up co-writing several of the songs on Elton John's *21 at 23* album. It was a strange pairing that wasn't nearly as exciting as it could have been.

Now, Robinson is back in the studio and working for himself again. With new band members (and co-writers) Joe Burt, Steve Blanehard and Derek Quinton, Robinson has recorded an album that is not as overtly political as his first two efforts.

*Sector 27* is a success, but a qualified one. Some of the energy has gone out of the lyrics, and the music of many of the songs is dangerously close to being repetitive, but it's a good foothold for a comeback of sorts, and better than a good number of releases I've heard this week.

With the exception of *Invitation: What Have We Got To Lose?* My favorite tunes on *Sector 27* are the

rockers: *Looking at You, Can't Keep Away, Take It Or Leave It*. There's nothing horribly wrong with any of the others; I just can't think of anything special about them either.

Like *Power in the Darkness* and *TRB Two* before it, *Sector 27* is concerned with the alienation of individuals by and within society. Robinson is telling us less about these individuals in the new record; whether this tack will make the subject more workable in a musical sense remains to be seen.

