

LIVE SOUNDS

Loving Joni a little

TO GET the most out of Joni Mitchell's songs, I think you must be able to love her a little. The things she sings, and the way she sings them, are so much a part of her, so personal, that objective examination destroys the essence of her appeal.

The effect of her songs depends not so much on any overt statement contained in them, but in the way that her audience reacts to what she says. She acts as a kind of prompt for the imagination of her audience; by being so honest and so direct in what she sings, she acts as a catalyst that sets free the thoughts and emotions of the people who listen. If you can't identify with her songs, if the things she says don't touch off a response in you, her music must become merely an object to be admired from a distance.

But that is not really the point. From that cold point of view there are many other musicians and songwriters to be admired as much, if not more, but when you can feel enough for her to let yourself be as honest and open as she is in her songs, to let her work on your own feelings, she becomes a powerful emotive force.

Her concert at the Festival Hall on Saturday was the first time I had seen her perform, and the only one of her albums I'd heard was "Ladies Of The Canyon", but after half an hour she had created a warm and sympathetic atmosphere with the audience.

She writes with great simplicity, yet after a few numbers I felt I knew exactly what she meant, or rather I knew what her songs meant to me. She didn't have to explain what she said, because either you knew intuitively, or it wouldn't really mean much to you anyway.

Judged coldly, her performance was flawed in places — she had tuning problems, she made a few mistakes, and sometimes when she let her voice fly up it drifted off course — but it didn't matter at all. Joni Mitchell isn't someone you watch coldly, her music is entirely personal and appreciating it is a subjective experience.

The concert was an intimate, friendly occasion. Joni sang and played as if she was at home, and the people clapped, sang "The Circle Game", with her and Willie Nash, and generally joined her in spirit as she sang things like "Chelsea Morning", "Marcie", "Rainy Night House", "Both Sides Now", and some newer things like "Christmas Song".

Her song about a New York street musician, "For Free", comes the nearest of any to being typical. In it,

she admires him for playing "real good for free" but doesn't go and do the same, though it is obvious she would like to. "I'll play if you've got the money, or if you're a friend to me" she sings. It is a song full on contradictions, without being hypocritical, conscious of her own weakness, but accepting it. Joni Mitchell lays herself open, and then it is up to us.

MAYALL

THERE WAS a general air of impatience at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, on Friday while a near capacity audience waited for the British debut of John Mayall's new band. Prior to the concert few people knew exactly what the line-up would be but most guesses were confirmed when Mayall introduced Harvey Mandel on guitar, Larry Taylor, bass and Don "Sugar cane" Harris, violin — the group he put together recently in America.

On paper they looked to be the best Mayall has yet assembled but there were too many disappointments despite the personnel, to justify any kind of glowing praise. Though it is early days, the new group have yet to capture the magic of Mayall's last venture with Jon Mark and Johnny Almond.

However, if they stay together long enough, things of interest will undoubtedly emerge once they have found a true direction.

Individually the group are excellent, especially "Sugar cane" Harris but he at times seemed to need more freedom. Harris's playing on "Nightflyer" and "Cryin'" displayed his very much percussive style to the full. Another of the evening's best numbers was "Nature's Disappearing" which gave vent to some tasteful harp playing from Mayall.

A pleasant extra to the programme came in the form of Keef Hartley who joined the band for the last number — "Possessive Emotions" — which could almost have been written for Hartley's drum style. And which also gave Mandel the chance to play his best of the evening. — RAY TELFORD.

RILEY

TWO OF Britain's best-known modern jazz names presented a remarkable contrast in approach at the Central London Polytechnic on Tuesday last.

The earnest and intelligent music of the Howard Riley Trio got the evening off to a stimulating start with a set which quickly moved into an inventive gear. Pianist Riley mixes elements of Bill Evans, Cecil Taylor and contemporary European classicism for a dramatic and striking synthesis, presented with a real poise and verve.

Barry Guy proves a sympathetic partner, and contributed an impassioned pizzicato solo and one highly amusing arco effort near the end which deserved special mention. Drummer Paul Lytton, a regular deputy for Tony Oxley, set up an exciting barrage of spiky, fragmentary sounds with a pointed melodic element, and proved a fine foil for his colleagues. All played beautifully to close with a storming version of "Eclipse".

The Mike Westbrook Concert Band opened with two love songs from the latest album, played in a sloppy, out-of-tune style which was emphasised by the poor



● BEACH BOYS: responsible for some classic pop.

acoustics of the room. I missed the middle of the set, returning three numbers from the end to find the band more together, but scarcely more interesting musically.

Rounding off with "Sad Song" and then "Wanderlust", the band tossed real ideas aside amid a thunderous rock beat. The closer raised the ghosts of the old trad days, but somehow it sounded so much cleaner then without the electric guitars and piano to clutter it. — MICHAEL WALTERS.

CROWS

IT WAS a pity that more people didn't turn up at Hampstead Country Club on Tuesday to hear Stone The Crows.

Despite a minimum audience, the Crows played a very inspiring set but it could have been so much better had they been given the opportunity to communicate with a larger gathering.

Even during the past three months Stone The Crows have changed but they are still a first class soul group — with currentless overtones.

At the heart of the group lies Jim Dewar on bass who has a perfect sympathy with drummer Colin Allen as well as John McGinnis on organ. The three of them make up one of the best rhythm sections in the country and they build an ideal framework for guitarist Les Harvey whose influences obviously cover a wide field.

The importance of Maggie Bell's voice to Stone The Crows is growing in line with the rest of the group. Undoubtedly a vocalist of lesser talents in such a group would have been swamped before now but

her performance on Tuesday proves that she is still very much an essential part of the group. — RAY TELFORD.

COMFORT

FAIRPORT REVISITED defied convention yet failed to gross anything magical. Students thronging the Friday night sell-out at Sheffield University sampled the best of two former worlds in the inspired coupling of Fotheringay and Matthews Southern Comfort.

Sandy Denny and Ian Matthews unhalfbricked together with Fairport Convention. Now they are rebuilding on their own. Miss Denny's monument is only half complete while Comfort sway from the top of an uncertain structure called a No. 1 hit.

But it is Fotheringay, reeking of potential impatient to be released, who are more satisfying. Apart from the superb voice and piano of Sandy Denny, they have Trevor Lucas.

Hampered by feedback, they hoisted themselves above electrical interference with a lively fusion of folk and rock. Maybe Fotheringay have yet to click properly, but they must soon. So long as they can offer songs like "Who Knows Where The Time Goes?" gruff voiced Trevor Lucas's bawdy ballads or Chuck Berry's "Johnny B Good" which has had them jiving in the isles at Barnsley.

Southern Comfort, borrowed from Neil Young, Fairport's Richard Thompson, Woody Guthrie, Goffin-King and, of course, Joni Mitchell. Ian Matthews dominates vocally, though he is nudged aside musically by that excellent steel guitarist, Gordon Huntley. It was very

competent, but no more than that. — FRANK HEATH.

PENTANGLE

ANYONE COMPLAINING that modern concerts don't give value for money should have been at Guildford Civic Hall last week. Occupying the front balcony of a modern municipal hall, with a £1 ticket, I saw Pentangle play intricate, intensely absorbing music for over two hours.

It was a casual, yet sublime evening, with Bert and John showing no ill-effects from having their guitars stolen recently. John, returning home, used an Epiphone, doubling up on electric, while Bert was on a Martin. As usual they faced each other from the wings, weaving the patterns, creating light and shade — John taking lead and then blocking, Bert hammering out the riffs.

With their new album "Cruel Sister" due out, it's interesting that Pentangle are arranging a lot more traditional folk material. They are dipping into the repertoires of people like Bert Lloyd, Cyril Tawney, Jean Ritchie and Tim Hart and Maddy Prior — expanding their scope and going back in time to create a carefully woven tapestry with intriguing patterns.

They opened with "Sally Go Round The Roses", then "Sally Free And Easy", John played "Lord Franklin", then Danny (bowed bass) and Bert (banjo) took the initiative on the Appalachian style "Wedding Dress". A wildly improvised version of "Penangling" was supposed to close the show but the group weren't allowed to leave before administering a speedy "Light

Flight". And that really did bring a halt to a most fulfilling and satisfying concert. — JERRY GILBERT.

BEACH BOYS

THE BEACH Boys have been responsible for some classic pop as they proved again at Hammersmith Odeon on Friday night. Yet no matter how brilliant "God Only Knows" and "Good Vibrations" are, and how perfectly the Beach Boys do them, I can't help thinking it's a good thing for them, and us, that they only come over once a year.

Absence, as the saying goes, makes the heart grow fonder and it's just as well. The Beach Boys act has hardly changed over the years, it mainly consists of their hits from the middle Sixties plus one or two tracks from their latest album which, on this tour, is "Sunflower". On Friday night they also went further back than their old hits in including "Riot", the old Coasters number, that Mike Love said they used to do before they became the Beach Boys.

The two numbers that they did from "Sunflower" — Bruce Johnson's "Tears In The Morning" and Dennis Wilson's "Forever" — pale into insignificance on comparison with "God Only Knows" and that is the Beach Boys dilemma. However excellent your execution, how long can you keep on doing the same old numbers? As long, I suppose, as you can attract full and enthusiastic audiences at the Hammersmith Odeon, and on that basis Mike Love, Al Jardine, Bruce Johnson, Dennis and Carl Wilson — and a few tremendous songs — are a winner. — ROYSTON ELDRIDGE

CURVED AIR

I SET out to watch Curved Air (at Implosion at the Roundhouse on Sunday evening) starting with the disadvantage of having read the Sunday papers. Derek Jewel, in the Sunday Times, described the group as "Folk rock" and however much I tried to avoid categorisation, I could not help expecting to see a pale imitation of Fairport Convention.

Curved Air are certainly not bad; they are not an imitation of anyone. Their music is fresh and exciting, and it is easy to see why Warner Bros. have spent a lot of time and money promoting them and their new album. Sonja Kristina the lead singer, was enthusiastically received by the audience (which may have had something to do with her voice, but on the other hand probably did not!). But musically, the group is centred very much on Darryl Way's exciting electric violin. Drawing freely from the classics he provides a pivot upon which the group's music turns.

The band played a set which featured several numbers off their LP, "Stretch" and "It Happened Today" standing out; they were very well received by the large Roundhouse audience. On this showing, it would seem that Warner Bros. confidence in them is justified. If there is any justice in the world, Curved Air are going to be very big. — NEIL MUNRO.

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