



Minnie Riperton

THE RIVIERA HOTEL, LAS VEGAS — A sure sign that a singer possesses genuine talent is said performer's ability to go beyond what has been expected all along and to give an audience something equally strong, but unexpected. In other words we know you're perfect, but what else can you do? Such was the case with Minnie Riperton's recent Vegas opening as her performing "more" was unveiled.

Ms. Riperton's (an Epic range) much talked about abilities in the area of upper vocal registers still waxed prominent as trilling forays into rarified octave air turned pop/soul compositions into something light years away. The subtle distortion of each lyrical phrasing proved a pleasant maturing point on Minnie's part as each song mixed auras of exotic and familiar. Some lyrical twists we've come to expect but this night surprises were definitely in the offing.

Showing particular strength was Ms. Riperton's rendition of "Loving You"; which seemed devised as sounding board for a series of experiments that worked. Working within a singing framework that seemingly defies earthiness and raw human emotion; Riperton's passages were full of body, depth and an earthy approach to authoratative tones. A lilting music with sudden bite.

"Adventures In Paradise" continued this musical bent with a head long plunge into a foreign sphere of influence. Vocals and taut backing instrumentals melded into creative oneness. Her vocal timbre as music tool doing what it does best.

Riperton's stage presence was a familiar mover in natural circles as glides, pauses and meaningful gazes formed an unshakable bond on a stage atmosphere of easy. Presence and music merged as one for a tongue in cheek conversation with a jive wishing well. A riff pulled off in believable fashion.

Minnie Riperton in Las Vegas.

A most natural of sevens.

m.s.

Mighty Clouds Of Joy Jiva

STARWOOD, L.A. — The Starwood became a revival meeting when the Mighty Clouds of Joy came on stage. The Mighty Clouds came mighty close to raising the roof of the club with their powerful and gripping performance.

Uptempo and funky was the word for the Mighty guys from L.A. as they shouted and talked to the audience through hypnotic rhythm and blues. Their carefree lyrics and pulsating music brought club patrons to their feet in many instances to stand up and be a witness.

The tension the backup band brought on were incredible. The Mighty Clouds had everybody rockin' and rollin' when they did "Time," and the Isley Brothers' classic "Shout," consecutively. The reaction it created was dyn-o-mite.

The real highlight of the show was when the Mighty Clouds did their most recent single release off their LP "Kickin'" entitled "Mighty High." This tune was even more magnificent live because it captured all the excitement of gospel music done in a rock way. It was like being in Reverend James Cleveland's church. The infectious rhythm of the tune along with the uncomplicated and happy lyrics had everybody out of their seats and out on the dance floor to boogie. The Mighty Clouds of Joy know how to put on a show and have everybody have as much fun as they do on stage.

Jiva opened to the Mighty Clouds and they put on a loud and uninteresting set. Their brand of rock and roll was very nondescript and totally unappreciated by the highly partisan Mighty Cloud crowd.

j.l.

Kiss

THE FORUM, L.A. — We miss out on so much by growing up. There were the games of make believe when wanting to be a fireman or a fairy princess weren't the pretentious notions of a not quite old enough mind. The courageous levels of obnoxiousness we aspired to because conscience and responsibility were words we hadn't learned yet.

Well, for all intents and purposes we do grow up. But what if — "Mom. Can I have an advance on next week's allowance? Why? Because Kiss is in town."

Kiss (from the caverns of Casablanca) encompassed, within the most basic of rock and roll frameworks, every conceivable phase of childhood recollection. And doing so in a most positive and palatable manner. Overkill in the finest pre-adolescent sense of the word reigned supreme as outlandish theatrics and primordial music held sway.

I mean who really cares if the chord progressions of "Deuce" and "Hotter Than Hell" owe more to Black Sabbath outtakes than to any progressive acts of god? So what if twenty minutes into the set everything started to sound the same? Wow! What a rush!

And that makeup. Not so much scary as gutsy; it harkened back to getting into dad's shaving cream and mom's face

powder. Dig it man! Look what Paul Stanley did and he got away with it.

The band's posturing was nothing short of every comic book you've ever read as the stance of kabuki punk from outer space cast an entertaining spectre over the arena confines. Gene Simmons as the fire breathing blood capsule going at instrumental odds with Ace Frehley's Commander Cody of the ozone. Finally Peter Criss as the studious kid with glasses whose history test you looked at if you had the chance.

The band's physical telling of the musical obviously found a willing and able balance in the insidious persona. Smoke bombs, snow, lights, sirens, flames. I could've sworn I saw the kitchen sink. All the elements of controlled chaos. And lest we forget Kiss's utopian anthem "Rock And Roll All Nite."

"And party everyday" cried the dude in the fifth row before toppling into an alcohol induced heap under the thundering riffs of "Cold Gin."

Lights up. My date looked at me and smiled. I did the same. It was again time to become an adult.

But it had been fun being fourteen once more.

m.s.

**Joni Mitchell
The L.A. Express**

NASSAU COLISEUM, UNIONDALE, L.I.

— Joni Mitchell's long-awaited reappearance in this area was an offering of material culled mostly from her later albums, the records with which she made the transition from a flaxen-haired folkie to a wealthy woman of the world. Her songs have steadily become those of a more self-assured person, as opposed to the love-lorn romanticism of her earlier material. This has alienated many fans and won over many new ones, but as evidenced by her performance, what-ever changes Ms. Mitchell has been through have at the very least served to make her a more confident performer of her own striking material.

Backed ably by the L.A. Express, who did an interesting soft jazz rock opening turn as well, or by her own unique guitar and piano playing, Ms. Mitchell gave a stirring display of her vocal style, which has gone from a rather bland and flat voice to a complexly fascinating instrument which slides effortlessly up and down, often dramatically counterpointing the music.

Highlighting the evening were her renditions of "For The Roses" and "Rainy Night House," and from her new album, "Shades Of Scarlet Conquering" and "In

France They Kiss On Main Street." She also performed several new songs, "Coyote," "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" and "Furry Sings The Blues" and "Talk To Me," which were exciting despite their unfamiliarity. She performed "The Jungle Line" from "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns" with two band members on the drum kit, plus a conga player, all pounding away loudly over a growling bass line. It was practically heavymetal Joni Mitchell, if one can imagine that, and it was extremely effective.

When Ms. Mitchell first appeared, she was dressed in black pants and jacket, with her hair tucked up into a black fedora. This outfit, plus her gaunt features, made her resemble David Bowie in one of his recent skins. The effect was cold and eerie and was a clear visual break with her past, but after a few songs she removed the hat and received an ovation as she shook down her blonde hair.

If one had any doubts that were not assuaged by her latest, brilliant album, this performance proved that Ms. Mitchell is one of the most talented writers and performers in popular music today.

e.r.

**The Crusaders
Street Corner Symphony**

ROXY THEATRE, L.A. — The Crusaders, with the skill and dedication of professional arsonists, set the Roxy on fire last week, drawing material primarily from their recordings on ABC/Blue Note.

This is, quite possibly, the tightest band working today; ensemble and solo oriented tunes are played with equal finesse. The set was built perfectly; each member's unique and individual talent was revealed, with enormous effect, through a casual, yet professional stage presence.

Wayne Henderson's trombone work was dynamic, as always. Larry Carlton proved himself a master of rhythm guitar, as well as lead, and Joe Sample's keyboard work was nothing short of astounding. Robert Popwell was recently added to the band as a bass player. His is

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Elvin Bishop

ROXY, L.A. — Elvin Bishop came roarin' on stage struttin' his stuff and presented a get down rip snortin' evening's worth of entertainment. To the man who plays the blues quick like silver it was quite a night. Elvin, who records for Capricorn Records has just released a new LP entitled "Struttin' My Stuff." Even though he was displaying tunes from the new LP, Elvin slipped into many tasty tunes from his earlier LPs. Things like "Traveling Shoes," "Fishin'" and "Stealing Watermelons" brought everyone a little closer to their roots while Elvin who resembled a cute teddy bear on stage wheeled a hot and vibrant guitar throughout the entire set.

Another reason why the show was so tight was Elvin's band. Each member of his band was on and they really dug what was happening. Johnny "V" Vernazza, Michael "Fly" Brooks, Don Baldwin, Bill

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Melissa Manchester

THE TROUBADOUR, L.A. — Way back in music's earliest presentations, you sang because it was in you to do so. No pretensions. No worries about being in the right key or register. It felt good so you did it. This attitude of "what the hell!" was applied by Melissa Manchester at her recent Troubadour gig with said looseness waxing successful.

Ms. Manchester (an Arista songstress) ranged wide the spectrum of influences during the course of her set; augering just the right touch of torch singer to blues, ballad and gospel flavored numbers. But it stood for Melissa's unbridled enthusiasm for each song to rise above the level of mere presentation.

Vocals, seemingly pretuned to the exact emotional demands of each song, made compositions part of a continuous musical flow. Songs with the power to attract and hold the listener's attention.

Uptempo gospel/blues proved particularly effective as Melissa and her moving backing band brought vocal and instrumental fire to the music. Full bodied pop ballads were the other side of her musical coin as the likes of "Happy Endings" and a riveting cover of "Rescue Me" showcased the lever that proper lyrical presentation has to excite.

The prime value of Melissa Manchester as a singer who can easily move in emotional circles came with her rendition of "Midnight Blue." Her subtle, reflective shots at the uncertainties of attachment cut through the curtain. Even if you had never experienced it, the song still got you where you live. Melissa Manchester at The Troubadour.

No communication-breakdown this night.

m.s.

**Donald Byrd
The Blackbyrds**

THE GROVE, LOS ANGELES — Blue Note recording artist Donald Byrd and the Blackbyrds had the audience in complete control in the second night of a two-night stand recently here in Los Angeles at the Coconut Grove. The night proved not only this group's draw appeal but how a show could completely involve everyone present in the packed theatre.

Most noticeable event of the evening was a mixture of tambourines and whistles thrown out to the audience by Byrd and his group on several songs. People were on their feet, catching the barrage of music makers and then joined in with accompaniment from all sides of the room.

The Byrd's movement on stage is good ... exciting ... and together. The sweet rhythm of "Sweet City Life," and total capture of "Walking In Rhythm" and "Rock Creek Park" highlighted the evening musically, but the uninhibited response from the audience — most out of their chairs and dancing with partners, some sitting but swaying with enjoyment to a great band — was overpowering. Everyone was moved from this band, who began with a very laid back approach and built the evening to a feverish finale.

Another interesting thing that the Blackbyrds did was to begin playing a tune, let the audience start to clap with the beat and then the group would let the song disappear until a major beat would bring it back. It was very nicely done and the crowd never stopped clapping, even on acappella performance. It was one of the best performance ever at the Grove by any group and they held full control.

"Flight Time," a very smooth, very long, and very calm Byrd interpretation featured a sax and flute special along with the rest of the band, most still in college, who are making the newest mark in music beyond just jazz or r&b.

j.b.c.