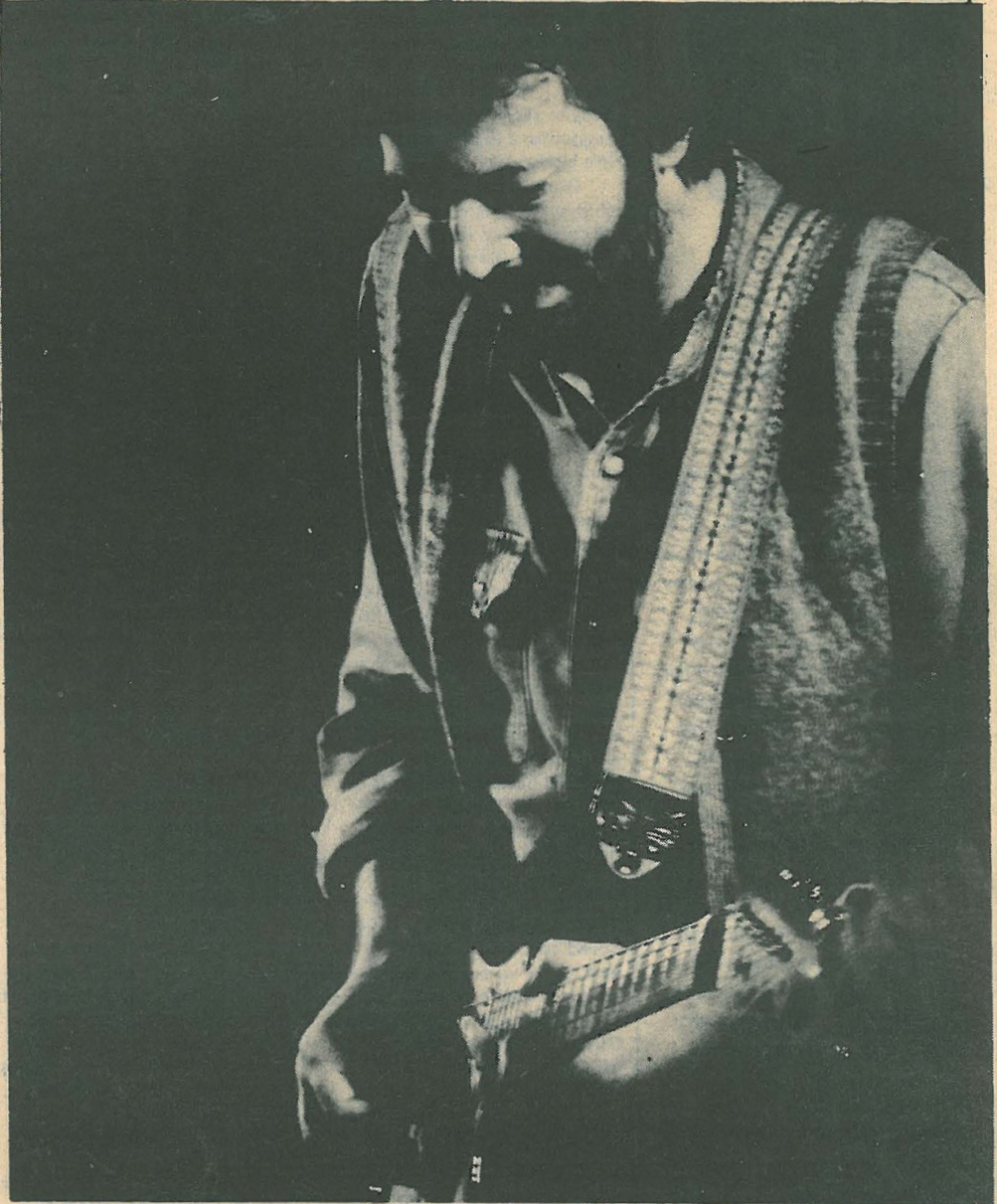




Eric Clapton. Pic: Colm Henry

Joni Mitchell. Pic: Colm Henry



Just Joni

JONI MITCHELL (RDS, Main Hall)

SOME SEVEN and a half thousand packed out two nights at Dublin's RDS main halls to surrender to one of the 60's enduring stars. Joni Mitchell's music is such that she commands the same breadth of audience as Bob Dylan or Van Morrison. Teenage girls and their mothers thought-by-thought in ease.

The RDS' somewhat eccentric acoustics and mega-village hall layout caused problems for those in the cheaper seats, but once they infiltrated the sides, and ignored the guitar player's... eh... blistering solos (move aside there, this is my space. Admire!) the excellence of Mitchell's performance was most impressive.

The willingness to bare the feelings and thoughts, and to introduce relatively heavy observations on human life and times in a conversational tone that scans, makes Mitchell one of the most interesting exponents of introspection-as-popular-art. She transcends, with absolute authority, the morose implications of the Me Generation, turning private thoughts to broader insights.

Her late '70's move towards jazz, and an acerbic view of the suburban world of jewels, lawns and lines, was well-represented too, though the over-enthusiasm of her lead guitarist constantly (and ironically) underachieved the music.

The highlight, perhaps, was her solo version of "America", a song that encapsulates everything one might wish to say about her as an artist — the ability to take a personal experience such as seeing jetplanes over the desert, and use it as a prism to look at herself, at women, at progress; as a singer with her openminded and (again) extraordinarily phrased guitar; as a lyricist to see how, more than almost any other writer still extant, she can take a metaphor and sustain it at such length. The hexagram of the heavens, the strings of my guitar indeed.

Dermot Stokes

SAMPLE AND HOLD/ST VITUS DANCE (Ivy Rooms)

"INTRODUCE THE audience to the band" laughed someone. A waggish remark cutting close to the bone. As crowds go, this wasn't one, but it didn't deter from the pleasing freshness of Sample and Hold, now revised in the rhythm section and revolutionised in intent.

St. Vitus Dance have the splenetic scratchiness of their name, but eventually fatigue sets in on their bashings. They have as yet only written one song, and kick it around here

and there, but rarely to pleasurable detail. I don't mind that the song remains the same, but this illness got me down

Sample and Hold soon assuaged my sickness. Their plateau Keyboards and Gordon Hoods egg-slicer guitar have always held merit intact. The (hopefully) upcoming single 'Monopoly Games' is as rich and textured as anything they've done, its simplicity and space a delight and a treasure. Certainly they lack attack, but for warmth and affection their tunes are a muffler of intoxication.

John McKenna

THE ROB STRONG BAND (Rockalls)

THE LAST time I saw Rob Strong was during his Friday night residency at the Baggot Inn, when without exception he played to packed houses who laughed, drank, danced and sang, and generally had a good ol' time, being good ol' boys.

Tonight however, was as far removed from then as possible. The venue was Rockalls' Disco cum gig, and while it had a bar, good music, good lights, and (compared to other venues) luscious, luxurious seating, only twenty or so people had arrived by half eleven, two and a half hours after the doors opened.

Starting off with 'Turn me Loose' and 'Come to Papa' it was clear that the departure of both Mark Costigan and Paul Moran — who have been replaced by Rocket's drummer and Brady boy, Fran Breen, and Brian Harris, a much sessioned man — would significantly effect the band's style. The audience apparently oblivious to the loss of impact in the songs, were more concerned with their latest 'fame' routines (which may well have accounted for their late arrival, and judging by the look of them, most likely did), than listening to the talents of the brass section — Jim Kerr, Trombone, and Richard Abbot on tenor Sax — who were blowing beautifully and belting out solos and runs all through the set.

The range of singer/Bassist — Rob Strong's voice was evident in songs like 'Down on the Main Street', 'Lovely Day', and 'Cocaine', three very different cover versions all stamped with his unique authority. His version of 'Cocaine' was surprising with its funk/disco break, but was typical of his innovative set. Playing some great honky-tonk, was Carl Durling, the sixth and final musician in the rock-blues band, whose writing talents could be heard in their current single 'Hey Little Girl'. 'Some Shiny

Day, found the band, once again playing in top form — what with the guitar solo, the brass riffs, an outstanding trombone solo, and a classic climax, no musical stone had been left unturned.

After 'Hollywood Nights', the final song in the ten song set, the crowd (!!!) proved to be as rapturous as woodworm in a coal-mine, and were more appreciative when the D.J. played the latest top-ten disco hit than they'd been throughout the gig (and people wonder why the music industry is in trouble).

Ironically, I remember the Baggot days when the rapport with the audience was ecstatic, when the crowd didn't idly dance to the beat, when mixing discos and gigs was an absurd idea (and still is) and when I never had to say when. Right now, the Rob Strong Band don't carry quite the same clout as the Moran/Costigan model, but the potential to match and maybe even better that chemistry is definitely there.

Mick Mc Elroy
BLUE RUSSIA (The Magnet)

BACK ON the Irish circuit after playing the German equivalent, Blue Russia, formerly, the Myster Men, proved at the Magnet that they've lost neither their durability nor potential — nor for that matter their fans' loyalty. Playing a new wave rock/pop, in a style unique to themselves, the band's energy, confidence and professionalism was both impressive and reassuring.

Also heartening was the news that, with the help of Blue Russia and management, arrangements have been made for the Magnet's re-decoration, which development should make Blue Russia's residency there all the more pleasurable.

The band have much to offer both individually and as a unit. Frank Washington's guitar work defines his role as the group's lynchpin, his riff and guitar solo on "European Limousine" being particularly memorable. Kudos too, to the rhythm section of drummer Noel McMurry and Tony St. Ledger,

Simply Eric

ERIC CLAPTON AND HIS BAND (National Stadium)

IT NOW seems that a Clapton concert has become an almost annual event in these parts. Once more back, he's in the Stadium for three sold-out shows after last time round, by all accounts, sacrificing himself and band to the resident acoustic gremlins of the RDS. Still the same familiar figure, deified in the era of the guitar hero, he now assumes the image of a comfortable icon — the ever-present waistcoat and the Stratocaster with cigarette perched on its headstock.

This time the line-up has been rearranged. Albert Lee still contributes second guitar and back-up vocals with the occasional spot at the ivories seated next to Chris Stainton, a stalwart of the English scene. On bass in Donald "Duck" Dunn, the ex-Booker T. sidekick and Stax anchorman, a luminary of even greater magnitude on the American scene, while returning to the drumstool is Tulsa man Jamie Oldaker.

Opening with the Southern rock "Tulsa Time" and following with "I Shot The Sheriff" in which Clapton lets loose a gripping, ringing solo, the Friday night set concentrated for the most part on old favourites like "Lay Down Sally" the Big Bill Broonzy Boogie standard "Key To The Highway" and Clapton's own ever-popular ballad "Wonderful Tonight", a version which stood out as hinting a jadedness. The current album, his best studio effort in some years, could have yielded more numbers but, surprisingly, only two were aired: "Ain't Going Down", which featured a tearaway wah-wah solo and Dunn's well-oiled hip-movements; and "The Shape I'm In" where the lick-trading between Lee and Clapton was in itself worth the price of a ticket. Lee, who took a solo spot with "Sweet Little Ida" must be the hottest country-style guitarist this side of the Atlantic and his solos throughout the set displayed a wider range of styles than I've heard him play before.

The climax came with "Cocaine" and as Clapton donned a Les Paul to play a sublime unaccompanied solo to introduce "Layla" the audience made a full-blooded advance frontstage during the fiery traditional encore — Bobby Bland's "Further On Up The Road". It was a no-messin' gut-bucket two hour set (Paul Brady, whom I'm afraid I missed, had earlier made it an even more worth while double-bill) predictable maybe, but with a bagful of inspired riffs to savour.

Jack Lynch

whose strong yet subtle teamwork was especially evident in the performances of their single "Russian Around" and "She Never Came". A professionally wrapped package is completed by Pete Delaney, a vocalist of notable range and an energetic performer to boot.

It's early days yet, but Blue

Russia are already showing signs of being real contenders for the future and one hopes that their Saturday night stint at The Magnet will bear witness to a continuing development.

Be there or be in Red Square!

Mick Mc Elroy