

cash box/talent on stage

Quicksilver Messenger Service Fanny

CARNEGIE HALL, NYC—Hours in the concert hall listening to groups and performers who are competent but nothing more vanish in the glowing light of Quicksilver who deliver a round, firm and fully-packed evening message every time.

Dino Valenti is very much still the focal point, both for his musical ability and his stage presence. If he honestly doesn't feel that each concert is a new, meaningful experience for him, he sure knows how to make a crowd think it is. His top-hat and leather vest lent an air of both old-time minstrelsy and new-styled raunch. The quintet opened with "Fresh Air" and that's just what the Capitol group is, despite the fact that some of their blues-oriented material in other hands might be extremely dull and lifeless.

Reprise quartet Fanny opened the show and it became easier and easier to discount the novelty of watching an all-girl band that isn't topless. Few numbers stood out in the usual sense, but the general effect of their performance was one of intensity

piled on a solid basis of musical sensitivity, both of which built to a rousing climax with their current single and LP title cut, "Charity Ball." Their "Ain't That Peculiar," of early Marvin Gaye vintage, featured slide guitar for variety, but basically was a straight-forward and faithful rendering of soul, pure and simple.

That particular tune might point to an area they seem to neglect for the most part, interpretation of established hits. While this might be somewhat out-of-vogue for a "progressive" act, it truly is the group's most shining and obvious ability and they shouldn't neglect it. We'd also like to hear more from pianist-singer, Nickey Barclay, who (you should excuse the expression) has enough balls for the bearing of any group of which she is a part, however small the role. Happily, Fanny gives her more than a walk-on as it now sits, but they'd do well to let her hang it all out as often as she can muster the seemingly bottomless energy.

r.a.

Savoy Brown John Baldry Wishbone Ash

CARNEGIE HALL, NYC—Now that The Stones and Ten Years After are safely tucked away on other labels, Savoy Brown intend to assume what they believe to be their rightful place as king of the London hill of rock talent. But they seem to be trying a bit too hard. In their efforts to match Alvin Lee with their own Kim Simmonds, the talents of keyboardman Paul Raymond are all too frequently sidestepped.

Performing many tunes from their Parrot LP, "Street Corner Talking," the accent was always on volume and overt excitement, even if it meant that the mood of "All I Can Do" had to be sacrificed to the pagans in the audience who couldn't understand tenderness if they fell into a pile of it. The group seems to have a predominantly male following, and perhaps they overlook Raymond because he's too suave and collected for their liking (as opposed to Simmonds who is raw and ragged). But when it came time for "Let It Rock," Paul stole the show and one can only wish that he'd be allowed to do it more often. As long as the group has forsaken their Chicago-blues approach of their first LP, they should let the most inventive of the group call the new shots.

Lead vocalist Dave Walker seemed like an instant replay of John Baldry who performed second on the bill. The Warners artist continues to present a visually rich but musically barren set of tunes which try to give the audience a white version of the Ike & Tina Turner revue. It don't work.

Decca's Wishbone Ash work real hard at their instrumentation, but their singing is best forgotten. The group tends to. They can do quite a bit with a limited repertoire of guitar ficks, but their mouths seem poor accompaniment to a conversation, let alone a musical exploration. What's wrong with being an instrumental group anyway—The Ventures are doing all right, ain't they?

r.a.

Miracles/Four Tops

GREEK THEATRE, L.A. — Top billed, and with good reason, was Motown's flagship group, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. The difference between the two acts was obvious from the first number, when Smokey and the gang burst on stage with an obvious enthusiasm. Their steps weren't very intricate, compared with the Jackson Five or the Temptations, but they were at least in order and together. The group got through about five numbers—including a medley of "We've only Just Begun," "I Can Make It With You" and "Close to You," and an inappropriate but nicely-performed uptempo "Abraham, Martin and John," when the fun really began.

Robinson, perhaps realizing that despite their extreme competence the show was dragging a bit, began to take audience requests. As a result, fans were treated to such oldies—but—goodies as "Bad Girl," "Choosey Beggar," and "Shop Around." The orchestra, not having arrangements for the impromptu selections, was forced to lay out. Know what? The weren't missed a bit. The Miracles' own rhythm section kept things moving along quite well; maybe in the future, performers will not feel obligated to use the strings and horns. Thanks to the Greek's poorly-miked and mixed sound system, the orchestra usually can't be heard, anyway.

Robinson's voice was, as always, a wonder; certainly one of the finest in the country. His own material and that of other composers chosen for the evening reflected an attention to lyrics and feeling that it often missing with Motown acts. And, thanks to his last-minute change of programming, the set was really memorable, and not just another piece of pseudo-nightclub fluff. Audience response to the act was excellent.

Opening the evening was the Four Tops. A Motown group who has always relied more heavily on vocals than showmanship, Tops' strong points this night were Levi Stubbs' lead vocals and some nice harmony on numbers like "It's All In The Game" and "Never Can Say Good-bye." Overall, though, the group seemed a bit below par.

t.e.

Sir Douglas The Quintet Augie Meyer

TROUBADOUR, L.A.—The idea of packing three acts into a club like the Troubadour, with a two-hour maximum for shows, is slightly less imposing when all three acts are part of the same family. For Polydor's Augie Meyer's Western Head Band and UA's The Quintet are both part of, or offspring from Mercury's Sir Douglas Quintet. Since the Quintet usually numbers six members (here, at times, there are eight on stage), it all gets a little confusing.

The show begins with Meyer's band. Pianist for the Quintet, in this context he plays rhythm guitar and sings lead, surrounded by the Quintet's drummer, his own bass player, head guitarist Bob Rafkin, and a three-girl chorus, led by his wife. Western Head is an accurate description: they're able to juxtapose Dylan ("Only a Hobo") with Gene Autry ("Riding Down the Canyon") with no trouble at all, and no disrespect for either. What they need most right now is a lot more rehearsal, and a set that's about ten minutes shorter. For their last number, "Roll Up Some Inspiration," Augie's son, Clay, joined the group on drums. A nice touch.

The Quintet is the Sir Douglas group, with someone called Big Guitar Sonny substituting for Doug, and

The Johnstons

GERDE'S FOLK CITY, NYC—Sure, this country spawned the blues and the blues spawned both rock and a still-present folk revival, but it's always been The British who have breathed new life into the forms. Pop was languishing until The Beatles turned us around, and so was folk until groups like Fairport Convention and The Incredible String Band showed us it was still a nice way to make music. Now from Britain (London via Ireland to be precise) comes another breath of fresh air tinged with the brine of a cross-Atlantic trip: The Johnstons.

You don't have to like Irish whiskey or even The Clancey Brothers to appreciate them. By straddling the Irish tradition while tackling Leonard Cohen, Gordon Lightfoot and the portraits of Chris McCloud they have fused together an act that is both enjoyable and (dare we say it) edu-

cational. Mick Moloney's prefaces to the group's tunes are singularly informative and amusing, while red-haired Adrienne Johnston strikes a fiery, yet lovable figure. Paul Brady rounds out the trio which has mastered 6- and 12-string guitar, mandolin, banjo and most importantly the art of singing as a group while still singing as one.

Their Vanguard LP, "Colours Of The Dawn" provided many of the high points of their set, especially "Crazy Anne," the title track and their song of "Angela Davis" which is circulating around FM stations much like Phil Ochs' "The War Is Over" a few years back. But the group does not protest as much as it celebrates—they throw a bash with a socio-musical consciousness and you really should drop in some time.

t.e.

r.a.

Bill Withers Cheech & Chong

TROUBADOUR, L.A.—This is just to second the words of praise heaped on Bill Withers in this space a month ago, when he played his first up-front date anywhere at the Bitter End in New York, and to confirm the effectiveness (the funniness, really—the genuine humour) of Cheech & Chong, who were also well received in these pages here after they, too, had played the Bitter End only a few weeks ago. Together, they made for a totally satisfying show. Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine," of course, has gone to the very top of the country's R&B charts and into the top ten on pop charts as well, and Sussex Records has just released his album "Just As I Am," which contains this single. Here, truly, is a tremendous talent. He had the local, hip audience in the palm of his hand. And small wonder: he speaks, and sings, to people in a very direct and irresistible way. He certainly is the sleeper of the season—and an exceedingly welcome one.

c.b.

Dan Hicks And His Hotlicks

GASLIGHT, NYC—Low-budget Catskill entertainment for the hip? Sergio Mendes meets Lambert, Hendricks & Ross with a side trip to Kweskin's Jug Band? What do they do with their stuffed bird between sets?

Between the props (bird, Hawaiian backdrop, vaudeville namecard) is a low-keyed high time to be had by all who will let their minds take a vacation. These four men and two women refrain from blasting us with any kind of volume level—but they shake up a place nonetheless. Minds fill the spaces.

Tunes from their Paramount-distributed Blue Thumb LP, "Where's The Money?" are all greeted with resounding familiarity. A new tune, "How Can I Miss You Won't Go Away" floats like a feather into their quasi-nostalgia groove — but it's deep enough to sway back and forth without forming a rut. The act appeals to those with memories of Sammy Kaye, Florian Zebach or The Airplane. On timeless, ageless, frabjous joy!

r.a.