

Concert Review

ETTA JAMES

The Strand, March 6

by Pat Kramer



With a voice that could cut through steel, 54-year old blues singer Etta James has earned her place in the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**, with her recent induction in January of this year. It's no wonder her Saturday night show sold out at this South Bay nightclub and a Sunday night show, also did very well. With Etta's most recent recordings, "*The Right Time*" in 1992 and "*Stickin' to my Guns*" in 1990, she has finally earned acclaim from the entertainment industry — with two Grammy nominations to date. In that regard, it was disappointing

that her show on Saturday was so routine and the set was so short.

Arriving nearly two hours past the 8:00 p.m. showtime, with no warmup band on the schedule, Etta was greeted with enthusiasm by her audience who had been anxiously awaiting her appearance. Though it was a short performance, it was clear that she was putting all she had into her show, running through such favorites as "*Damn Your Eyes*," and "*I Would Rather Be Blind*."

Etta's show was the usual bump and grind variety. A large woman with an extremely powerful and commanding stage presence, Etta has a way of taking songs with sad, mournful lyrics and translating them into bawdy, sexy shows that wind up making you feel like laughing instead of feeling the blues. Her dramatic showmanship and ability to duplicate other blues singer styles (**Muddy Waters**, **Ella Fitzgerald**) are her strong points. Her weak points, however, are the brevity of her shows and her failure to perform encores.

Saturday's show lasted just over an hour, with Etta's band filling for 15 minutes at the start of the show, after it was announced Etta was "on her way from the hotel." For their part, her band put on a lively side show with guitarists

Josh Sklair and **Bobby Murray**, bass player **Richard Cousins** and keyboardist **Dave Mathews** each soloing on their respective instruments. When Etta did arrive, rather than choosing songs from her own rich repertoire, she chose instead (for at least half of her 8 songs) cover tunes by other artists like "*Come to Poppa*," by **Bob Seeger**, "*Hard to Handle*," by **The Black Crowes** and standard well-worn blues covers that short changed the show.

For a singer with such amazing vocal abilities and interesting interpretations of blues material, it was not a show that featured Etta James' strongest traits. When the set was done there was no encore and she left her true fans, without having ever reached that "peak" that audiences seek from the performance. Perhaps when she returns on tour this summer with **B.B. King**, we'll get to see a more original set.

In the meantime, **Island Records** will be releasing a new recording featuring Etta James, called "*The Island Sessions*." On the previously unreleased material, Etta sings with **Art Neville**, **David Lindley** and **David Hidalgo** from **Los Lobos**. According to the latest reports, that music should be out in stores by the end of this month. ■

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that relieve stress or aid in healing, assertiveness, strength, prosperity, etc.) than anything he has done in the past.

Oddly enough, this collection of tone paintings is anything but the elevator music one might normally attribute to instrumental covers. I can't tell you how much pain I go through when I am shopping and hear an old **Chicago** tune with oboe and marimba in the melody line.

Instead, Fisher has managed to capture just enough of Lennon's tunes to be recognizable (just barely enough in some cases). He's slowed the meter to it's furthest point and literally covered a canvas with some very beautiful and haunting orchestrations. If you are not nor ever have been into TM, this may be your chance to catch up. Or pick it up to help you wind down on the freeway — just stay out of the left lane please.



Capitol recording artists **School of Fish** will hit the road with a series of U.S. and Canadian club dates in support of its smashing new sophomore effort, "*Human Cannonball*." Shows will kick off March 2 in Phoenix, AZ, and are scheduled to run through April with a show at **The Palace** in L.A. on April 16.

With comparisons to everyone from the **Beatles** to the **Jesus and Mary Chain**, School of Fish garnered critical raves and saw their 1991 debut featured in

year-end "Best Of..." lists in publications such as the **L.A. Times**, **Denver Post**, **The Hard Report**, **Hartford Advocate** and **Virginian Pilot**.

"*Human Cannonball*" once again spotlights

Josh Clayton-Felt and **Michael Ward**'s uncanny knack for combining pop hooks with a grungy, neopsychedelic edge. Tracks like "*Fuzzed and Fading*," "*Jump Off the World*," and their first single, "*Take Me Anywhere*," emphasize the harder guitar sound that Ward hinted at on the first album and so aptly displayed in their aggressive live sets.

The group gained Top 5 Commercial Alternative success "*3 Strange Days*," the first single from their debut album. ■

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