

Talent On Stage

JAMES BROWN

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, N.Y.—It was a case of too much for our money as James Brown presented his standard revue, plus several guest acts, to 18,000 fans at Madison Square Garden last week (22). It's hard to fault Brown for wanting to provide as much entertainment as possible, especially with a \$10.00 top) for his fans, but the long procession of talent only served to dampen the enthusiasm or his own top-notch showing.

After Count Basie opened the show (an event we missed), and after a few numbers from the James Brown band, followed by the introduction of Miss Harlem, Brown came on to move the show into high gear with "If I Ruled the World," which has become almost a theme song for his economic black power campaign. Not being a soul brother, we felt that Brown's long introduction to "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" could have been shortened, but the crowd enjoyed every minute of it. "Say It Loud" was followed by "I Guess I'll Have To Cry, Cry, Cry," "Goodbye My Love" (his current charter) and "Kansas City" all accompanied by Brown's strong choreography (a major part of his act, so it seemed from the applause from the crowd every time he broke

into a step).

There was nothing wrong with any of the acts that followed (in fact there were several bright moments), but taken as a whole the performances of Hank Ballard ("Let's Go, Let's Go, Let's Go" and "How Cou Gonna Get Respect If You Haven't Cut Your Process Yet), Marva Whitney ("Love Makes A Women," "Who Can I Turn To" and "Respect"), Ramsey, Lewis Trio ("Wade In The Water," "The In Crowd" and others), the Manhattans ("I Want My Baby" and others; their footwork caused a lot of excitement also) and a strong comic, Clay Tyson, were just too much strain on our faculties. By the time Brown returned to sing "Cold Sweat," "There Was A Time," "Try Me" and "Please, Please, Please," the majority of the audience was extremely restless.

James Brown is Soul Brother Number One and Mr. Dynamite and he did his thing well, very well indeed. But we doubt whether even a special appearance by Adam Clayton Powell could have stirred up the audience to the proper degree of excitement. A lot less Revue, and more James Brown would have been a better formula.

IRON BUTTERFLY CANNED HEAT YOUNGBLOOD

FILLMORE EAST, N.Y.—Bill Gramam took a mixed bag off the rock shelf and poured out close to four hours of heavy entertainment for the sell-out crowds that attended four shows at his New York rock palace last weekend (23,24).

The Iron Butterfly, probably this country's top electronic feedback outfit (at least in terms of popularity) headlined the show, and due to theateness of the hour tried to get away with performing only one number, the long version of their "In-Gadda-Da-Vida" charter, but the crowd pulled them back for a long no-number encore. The Butterfly are almost a religious-mystical experience, depending heavily on lyrical and musical chants to create a suitable atmosphere, and they performed their tes well.

Canned Heat is the super-hot Los Angeles hard-blues band, and received the strongest acceptance in terms of vocal audience response. The Heat have only one failing: they have no outstanding solo artists (many good groups don't), but (perhaps because of the heavy use of solos by the English blues bands like (Jeff Beck Ten Years After) they engage in

super-long (and mostly uninteresting) solo work. When the Heat play together, they display a hard, soul-filled sound which any other group would be hard-put to match. Their lead singer, Bear, can be described as a male Janis Joplin, constantly on the move, and creating excitement wherever he goes. Tunes on the set included "Sandv's Blues," "We Love You," "Sonny Boy" and "Boogie."

The Youngbloods, originally a New York group, have been out on the West Coast for some time, and this engagement was their first performance here in quite some time. Now down to three members, the folk-rock based group, have gained enough skill and maturity to enable them to turn the volume on their amplifiers down to an acceptable level. And they're well worth hearing. Material ranged from Chuck Berry's "Too Much Monkey Business," to Dino Valenti's almost-standard "Get Together," to Fred Neil's "The Dolphin," and also included "Darkness," "Moxie," an instrumental, "Ain't That Loving You" and "Beautiful." The Youngbloods have come a long way, and we anxiously await the release of their third LP by RCA, skedded for January.

SLIM HARPO

THE SCENE, N.Y.—New York has been a lot of blues lately. Authentic Chicago electrified blues; derivative but definitive electrified English blues; blue-eyed authentic blues (from an Morrison and others); and plenty of faulty attempts to cash in on the blues craze. The only kind of blues we haven't seen is the down-home Memphis blues, familiar to most ortherners only through an occasional hit by Slim Harpo.

Slim Harpo, accompanied by Light-er Slim, made his New York debut last week (25) at Steve Paul's Scene. It was quite possibly his first performance before a white audience, and in the beginning, Harpo was ready for the worst. But, as usual,

the Scene audience came to listen and learn, and put the artist at ease after just a few minutes. Although lacking the heavy electrical virtuosity of a B. B. or Albert King, Harpo seemed to communicate more directly with the audience, possibly because his songs come from more common roots. Harpo alternated vocals with Lighting Slim, played the harmonica (or is it a mouth harp?) and occasionally contributed some acoustic guitar work. The other Slim handled the electric guitar work, and Young Jessie provided the drum backing. Set included Harpo's two major hits, "Rainin' In My Heart" and "Baby, Scratch My Back," both recorded for Excello in Nashville.

FRANK SINATRA

5th DIMENSION—JOSE FELICIANO

Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas—It was the kind of corsege evening you press in your memory book. In a page close to that resonant age when George Gershwin tinkled "Concerto in F" at Lewisohn Stadium in the 30's. When Basie and Ellington battled their brassy bands in Harlem in the 40's. Or that night when you first caught him with Dorsey at the Astor Roof. Cornering him between sets while your ballerina prom date petitioned for his autograph.

After 14 months of self imposed exile from the nitery circuit, King Francis Sinatra is at the Palace. Flailing away with the same clear, clean, vigorous efficiency that has almost always adorned his efforts. An elegant legend in a Nehru shirt, black tuxedo and a baby blue spot.

Sinatra is no baby. He'll be fifty-three this week. A lot of guys are still singing at fifty-three. But none with the incorruptible, eloquent purity that draws every ounce of warmth and power and meaning from a word, a gesture and a note.

Harry James opens the show with a musical exercise in nostalgia. That bubble gum cheek and remarkable embouchure winging you home to those redolent matinees and nights at the Roseland Ballroom, the Strand, the Paramount and the Meadowbrook. "It's nice to have our original vocalist back with us," he says, reminding that one-fourth of a century has elapsed since Sinatra sang "All or Northing At All" with his band. Songs like "It's Been A Long Long Time," "Cherry" and "You Made Me Love You" warbled now by Joanie O'Brien. For just a few moments anyway, she is Helen Forrest and you are sixteen.

There is, too, the element of a pop music festival in the Fifth Dimen-

sions' mod-rock-soul tunes. Limited to just four, they make the most with a "Love Love Love" and "What the World Needs Now" medley, "Sweet Blindness," and the inevitable "Up Up and Away." Ebulliently dancing, shaking and exploding across stage, they are first rank performers.

José Feliciano is there too. The kid who owns '68. The star spangled odds-on favorite to cop the Grammy come March as the nation's #1 new star. An incredible virtuoso, he too is limited to a just a handful of tunes ("Hi-Heel Sneakers," "Light My Fire" and "Malaguena") eliciting prolonged acclaim from the celeb-studded audience.

Comic Pat Henry, drawing less from his usual ethnic quip bag, is also in rare form. "Have you noticed," he asks, "that since the Chinese got the bomb, they don't do shirts good anymore?" And towards the end of his fifteen minute stint he cautions, "don't go 'way, there's another act to follow."

Then suddenly there's Sinatra. The enduring idol. One hour and fifteen minutes of mystique and magic. He's got the world on a string. He's young at heart. He's even younger than springtime. He hates California—"it's Reagan and damp." And, by all means, he's got you under his skin.

He half blows the word "bastard" in the "Soliloquy" from "Carousel" and for half an instant you die with him. Twenty-three songs after you're dripping damp in nostalgia, still waltzing with that memory of your prom date ballerina. The lights come up to an overture of acclamation for "the noblest Roman of them all." It is 1:15 A.M.

You could have danced all night.

BEACH BOYS GRASS ROOTS

STANLEY THEATER, N.J.—Having missed the Beach Boys in their recent New York concert, we ventured out to New Jersey, one of the East Coast surfing strongholds, to catch them in concert with Dunhill's Grass Roots and the Pickle Brothers comedy trio.

Since the last time we saw the Beach Boys, they've added a strong backing unit with four horns, an extra guitar and additional percussion, and it has improved their live sound immensely. The current tour has apparently given the group a lot of time to practice, and their vocal harmonizing, which had started to develop rough edges, has been nicely polished up. Set included a heavy dose of Beach Boy goldies, including "Darling," "California Girls," "Good Vibrations" (a vastly improved read-

ing), "Do It Again" and their current "Bluebirds Over The Mountain." "Their Hearts Were Full Of Spring" was the only non-Beach Boy tune delivered, and it was powerful done accapella.

The Grass Roots, riding high on the crest of the recent Top 5 "Midnight Confessions," and the current "Bella Linda" smash, also turned in a heavy showing. We're looking forward to catching their New York debut at (hopefully) the Fillmore East in January. Tunes included "Things We Said Today," "Let's Live For Today," "Where Were You When I Needed You" (all past hits) and "Mojo."

The Pickle Brothers, as always, turned in a fine between acts stint.

FOUR SEASONS

EMPIRE ROOM, N.Y.—The Waldorf Astoria chose the Four Seasons to be the first rock group to headline their posh Empire Room, and the choice was a wise one. The Seasons still have to learn a slightly more sophisticated brand of humor for the adults in the audience, but their music was faultless and well accepted.

With the exception of an opening medley, consisting of "Sound Of Music," "With A Song In My Heart" and "Without A Song," their show did not vary greatly from their regular stage act. Their own instrumental work, and that of their regular horn and rhythm section, was augmented by the Waldorf orchestra, but the Seasons ability to perform their hits live has always been strong, and the extra instruments merely served to enhance the sound.

"Working My Way Back To You" and Frankie Valli's solo on "Can't Take My Eyes Off You" was followed by an original musical skit on "How Do You Make A Hit Song," a pleasant piece of nonsense describing the background to "Sherry." "Opus 21," "My Mother's Eyes" (another Valli solo), "Don't Think Twice" (which they hit with as the Wonder Who?), and comedic routine using an "I'm In The Mood For Love"/Moody's Mood For Love medley kept the show moving at a varied, but fast clip. Group closed strongly with a hit medley of "Sherry," "Walk Like A Man," "Big Girls Don't Cry" and "Bye Bye Baby (Baby Goodbye); and "I've Got You Under My Skin," and then came back for a scheduled encore of "To Give" and "Let's Hang On."