

Mother Earth, Fleetwood Mac, Savoy Brown

Alex von Hoffman

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There are three basic ways to play the blues and the show at the Grande Ballroom the other night was a good lesson in all three. Mother Earth, Fleetwood Mac, and the Savoy Brown Blues Band have each copped a distinct and different aspect of the blues, or life, for that matter, because that's what blues is all about.

Mother Earth plays that crying, touch your soul, kind of blues. Their lead singer is a long blonde-haired chick who looks and moves like a fourteen year old innocent and sings like she took sensitivity training from Bessie Smith.

Her name is Tracy Nelson and she's in a Janis Joplin bag, but, at least vocally, has more poise and control than Janis. Slow and sorrowful or fast and mean, she projects emotions into her songs with a believability that can only come from experience.

Incidentally, on the Mother Earth album, *Living With The Animals*, Tracy puts down some beautiful soul on two cuts in particular, "Down So Low" and "Cry On."

Unlike groups like Big Brother and the Holding Co., Mother Earth is a band who can keep a rhythm. The drummer and bass man were very together and able to produce a danceable beat on songs like Kim Weston's old hit, "Rock Me For a Little While."

The sax player, Martin Fierro, got down with it whether he was playing his big tenor or singing blues in his precise old-fashioned style. Mother Earth played straight twelve-bar, rock originals, and a little Motown but it all came out the moanin' blues.

Fleetwood Mac doesn't play sad, they play happy. Probably the best of the English blues bands, Mac's main thing is updating older country and city blues with a rocking beat and a joyful attitude. They really dig their music and that night the feeling was contagious.

Peter Green is already famous for his excellent guitar playing, but is less well known as a good singer. Actually, his clean, straight-forward singing style did a lot better than Mick Fleetwood's imitation of old time country blues singers.

The band seems to do nothing but uptempo songs but the infectious feeling Mac puts in standards like "Hell-hound on My Trail" kept heads bobbing throughout the hall.

Toward the end of their set Fleetwood Mac changed styles somewhat and started doing some 1950s rock and roll. The band really got together and jammed on "Tallahassee Lassie" and "Blue Suede Shoes" and the audience at the Grande dug it so much they gave Mac a standing ovation and called for an encore.

What they got was Fleetwood Mac's gross-out parody of Elvis Presley which is funny at the beginning but gets monotonous after a while. That good old rock and roll sure is a gas, though.

Still another way to play the blues was exemplified by the Savoy Brown Blues Band: they play bullshit blues. Out of rhythm and too loud, the guitars, bass and drums ran a decibel race that made the MC5 sound soft and melodious.

Their efforts to create musical paranoia didn't have much to do with anything, let alone blues. Meanwhile, in full length fur overcoat, black top hat, and droopy mustache their lead singer made spastic marionette motions, occasionally puffing on a fat cigar.

He could have easily passed for a 1920s Wall Street millionaire, and considering his plastic lockjaw mimicry of Delta blues singers, he put about that much feeling into his singing.

The hysterical minstrel show in reverse bag might be funny if a lot of other groups weren't getting into the same draggy thing. Luckily, Savoy Brown played a fairly short set.

After that, the show was over and the Grande people had been taught their lesson in life. And if you didn't catch it, dig up, buttercup, it's very simple: laugh and cry but don't bullshit.

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