

Performances



Commander Cody The Bottom Line

By Mitch Schneider

Maturity, finesse and creativity are often conspicuously absent from live performances these days, though Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen, who have increasingly grown tighter through the years, successfully fill any current abyss of style, recently bringing the audience at the Bottom Line to a hooting, clamoring and stomping frenzy.

The eight-piece hot country rock and roll aggregate, who hail from California, draw their material from, as well as presently write their own songs in the style of, the boogie-laden 40's and the greasy 50's and render truly authentic Texas swing in a manner that never sounds derivative; their unmatched enthusiasm and refreshingly zany, redneck approach transcends the confines of nostalgia.

An unresolved problem encountered at their performance: you don't quite know who to watch; Cody, as custom has it, revels in his own drunkenness, spewing polished piano notes and madcap monologues ("Hot Rod Lincoln," "That's What I Like About the South" and "Cellblock No. 9"); fiddle and sax extraordinaire Andy Stein, finally given free instrumental reign and who stole the show, contorts his face with wild expressions, occasionally sticking his foot into his sax; singer Billy C. Farlow, while talented, has thankfully stepped out of the complete spotlight and bumps and grinds like a greaser king; Ernie Hagar, your typical okie, jokingly counterpoints the band's long-haired, redneck madness, and runs up and down the frets of his pedal steel, cranking out precious notes from the

double octave; and guitarists/vocalists Bill Kirchen and John Tichy, hands shakin' and fingers pointin', mirthfully lecture about truck drivin', jails and hot kissin' women.

Their irresistible stage presence and unrivaled synchronization, with each member alternately stepping into the spotlight, inevitably transforms their concert into a well-scrubbed, night club revue, which works best in an atmosphere like the Bottom Line, rather than the concert halls they usually play this side of town.

Old favorites—"Beat Me Daddy Eight to the Bar," "Lost in the Ozone" and "Diggy Liggy Lo"—as well as songs from their recently released fifth album were included in their all-encompassing repertoire in which the harmonic interplay of the pedal steel, lead guitar and fiddle built into musical sweeps.

If not enough, country singer Emmy Lou Harris (who formerly sang with the late Gram Parsons and currently has her own album) unexpectedly joined Cody's cronies on two songs, one of which was "Jambalaya." My only gripe was that Hank Williams couldn't attend.

Janis Ian The Bottom Line

By Susan Ahrens

An electric cowprodder would have done Larry Gatlin a world of good in speeding up his drowsy tumbleweed-like narratives. Gatlin used to play with Kristofferson, and traces still linger. Gatlin doesn't mumble the way his former lead man will, but Gatlin does string his song ideas along in concrete sentence form, and one can almost visualize the punctuation marks. His images are laced with country romance and humor

as he sings about ladies "who rub you the right way" in "Maggie Blue's Massage Parlour Blues," and a traveling musician's bout with road fever in "Ode to the Road."

Gatlin has a beautifully sweet honey drawl of a voice that reminds one of Mickey Newbury (remember his "American Trilo-

You'd think that with all the years she's spent in the business Janis Ian would have enough polish to shine a Vegas dance floor. Not so; the word in her case is poise, and this poise keeps her show from ever getting slick.

Few people go to "see" Janis Ian and "hear" her music. Her audiences go prepared to get

duces this song with a very "please-don't-laugh-at-me" look on her face. I can understand the fear, the song lays bare all of her truest feelings, but nobody ever laughs. At song's end, I turned around and my friend's glasses were fogged. Now, if Janis Ian can reach that old stoneheart, you know she has a rare and



Photo by Mary Ailfer
special talent.

gy" that included the "Battle Hymn of the Republic"?), and in songs like "Heart" or "Penny Annie" he glides to high notes that would make Roy Orbison choke. Add to this a strong resemblance to Mac Davis, and you have a performer who would be better suited for a more sedate, established gig, say, a summer T.V. show on channel 4, but who did come off with a lot more polish than most country opening acts.

involved. They relive her adolescence and their own in "At Seventeen" and suffer the agony of an empty bed together in "Jesse." Yet Ms. Ian is no dour young woman as many think. She debuted some very interesting and upbeat new material including a great jazzy little piece, "I Got the Blues Morning to Night," which featured fantastic vocals by Janis and Claire Bay.

The showstopper, of course, was "Stars." Janis still intro-

**IMPORTANT
MESSAGE
FROM IMPULSE
MUSIC**
See our Ad in the
Classified Section