

Opening with Mickey Marchello's comment that he was wearing a suit and tie so he could "look dignified enough to get away with saying 'fuck you' on stage" the Rats' act is infused with a sardonic sense of humor. Peppy Marchello has a superb sense of comic timing -- at one point in the set, one of New York's finest walked into the club and was greeted with a boppy chorus of "Nobody loves the law more than the Rats/Some of our best friends are blue." This came after they had threatened before the set to burn the place down if they were hassled for playing too loud.

The Rats' musical humor is not confined to light comic songs like "Tasty" and the "Brooklyn Country." Bar misadventures provide the material for two rockers which cast Gatto and Peppy Marchello as the Michael Doonesbury's of rock 'n' roll: "Cuckoo Coo" -- "Since your face could stop a clock/I'll call you Cuckoo Coo" and "Reason to Kill," the tale of "Pencil-Dick" Gatto's drunken revenge on the golddigger who cleaned him out and packed him in.

The Good Rats play rock 'n' roll with 1960's enthusiasm and 1970's musicianship, with enough inventiveness and diversity to be interesting but still very accessible. Any band which can shake your ass and make you laugh simultaneously has to be pretty incredible.

Gary Wright Central Park

by Mike Rogers

With two hit singles and a platinum album after years of almost making it, Gary Wright was in high spirits as he greeted the Central Park crowd. He strapped on a portable electric keyboard



GARY WRIGHT

and glided into a precisely executed set of songs from Dream Weaver and his forthcoming album, *The Light of Smiles*. Parading across the stage, looking angelic in a white, purple-trimmed jumpsuit, Wright performed with a professional balance of exuberance and control. He came as close as possible to recreating his spacey studio sound, and songs like "Love Is Alive," "Let It Out," and "Dream Weaver," equalled the recorded versions.

After a few songs, however, Wright and his battalion of keyboards became tedious. The droning synthesizers, which at first creamed Wright's raspy vocals, ultimately clouded them. The limitations of using only a drummer, keyboards, and backup vocalists became increasingly evident: melody was overwhelmed by rhythm, subtlety forsaken for

power.

The concert climaxed when colored balloons swarmed up from behind the two speaker scaffolds and melted into the darkening sky like M&M's. On stage, Gary Wright was singing: "Dream Weaver, I believe you can get me through the night." The crowd was sedate and content. For this reviewer, however, Wright's nocturnal emission was a shot in the dark.

The Band Chris Hillman Palladium

by Mitchell Schneider

It was only fitting that promoter Ron Delsener chose the Band and former Byrd/Burrito Chris Hillman to reopen the newly reupholstered and refurbished Academy of Music, now called the Palladium:

Both acts are in some way responsible for creating the most timeless and honorable North American music of the last decade. The enthusiasm surrounding the weekend event was swelling; both shows at the 3500-seater were sold-out, the first radio-broadcast live over WNEW-FM.

Onstage, the Band -- who first surfaced on the music scene during Dylan's 1966 world tour as the Hawks, his backup band -- played with a verve professionalism. Backed by a seven-piece section which included a tuba, flute and saxophones, the group achieved an amazingly full-bodied sound which is nonexistent on their seven studio recordings (counting *The Best of the Band*, their current release). Not that their albums are poor. In fact, *Northern Lights*, *Southern Cross*, the most recent studio LP, indicates that the group is as

melodic and vital as ever.

Most of the songs performed -- especially "Across the Great Divide," "Up On Cripple Creek," "The Weight" and "Arcadian Driftwood" -- still showed the group to be Priests of the Backwoods singing at the crack of dawn: very rustic, spiritual, emotional, even picturesque.

As always, their songs, which are as knowledgeably crafted as the Beatles' and wed country with rhythm and blues, were underscored by their piano/organ combination sound. This, coupled with Robbie Robertson's handsome lead runs and the flexibility achieved through the three alternating lead vocalists, confirms the Band's status as one of rock's most prestigious groups.

If the concert had virtues, it also had flaws. Garth Hudson's belabored classical keyboard introduction to "Chest Fever" upset the concert's continuity, and Paul Butterfield's surprise appearance during one of the encores was needlessly squandered due to the inaudibility of his harmonica.

Opening the set was Chris Hillman, who, along with Gram Parsons in the Flying Burrito Bros., helped define the country-rock marriage. Though his association with the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band was ultimately a waste of time and effort, his first solo LP, *Slippin' Away*, and performances at the Palladium underscored his obvious talents as songwriter, vocalist, and mandolinist. True, Hillman isn't dynamic; true, his five-piece backup band isn't particularly outstanding; and true some songs performed were lethargic ("The Rise and the Fall" and "Slippin' Away"). But his choice of two Burrito songs -- "Sin City," a song about Hollywood decay that he penned with Parsons, and "Hot Burrito #2" -- were performed so touchingly with the harmonies intact that it made up for any deficiencies.