

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



CONCERT REVIEW: NYC in the 805

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Anyone heading to the Garland Jeffreys show at SOhO on Sunday night expecting a mellowed performance from the 68-year-old would have been pleasantly surprised to find a man on fire and very much in the groove. Mr. Jeffreys capped off a generous and high-spirited show, a long overdue Santa Barbara debut, by standing on the table, after having mingled with the crowd throughout the night. If anything, the antic performer himself might have felt the mellow factor emanating from this admiring sit-down crowd, who couldn't quite summon up enough fervor for a sing-along on "Hail, Hail, Rock and Roll."

Needless to say, this New Yorker, a semi-legend praised for his literate lyrics and his finger on the rock-folk-reggae-soul pulse, is on fire at the moment, especially given the recent release of one of his stronger records yet, "The King of In Between." Joined by a tight four-piece band (all in black, of course, these being New Yorkers of a certain age), Mr. Jeffreys ranged across his decades-long life in music, including his signature early '70s tune, "Wild in the Streets," and the new wave-y "Modern Lover."

As if to make a statement from the get-go, Mr. Jeffreys kicked off Sunday's show with the affirmative blast of "I'm Alive," and then transitioned into the striking opening track from his new record, "Coney Island Winter." With the song, his rambling, reflective lyrics — evoking the influence of his pal Lou Reed and his hero Bob Dylan — touch on the singer's own Brooklyn roots while also sizing up social conditions of our day.

Apart from the ample entertainment quotient of the evening, we also got compact evidence here that Mr. Jeffreys' songbook is a rich and diverse body of work. He deftly channels cinematic references in "35 Millimeter Dreams" and again gets both personal and universal with his anti-racist classic "Don't Call me Buckwheat," done up in gospel mode. Reggae has filtered through his career, as well, and the Jamaican vibe showed up on "I May Not Be Your Kind" and "We the People."

Mr. Jeffreys lurched into the chugging boogie groove of "'Til John Lee Hooker Calls Me," also from his new album and one of the wittier and coolest songs about mortality in recent memory. In this scenario, the singer's combo guardian angel and not-so-grim repair is the late blues icon Hooker.

But mortality was the farthest thing from anyone's mind at SOhO. What we had here was a

power to communicate, from an old hand with a promising future.

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