

ARTISTS IN ACTION

(Continued from page 15)

Western Rap," which, as performed here, mixes yodeling with human beat-box and links Haggard with Hammer.

Gilbert did a 15-minute spot in the first half of the show, as did the others. Kristina Olsen's elliptical, bottlenecked steel guitar rendition of Robert Johnson's "Come On In My Kitchen," in which she let guitar slurs substitute for skipped words and otherwise had fun with the salacious lyrics, was another highlight of the opening segment, which gave way after an intermission to everyone taking turns within a group format. Morrissey quickly upped the fun level: After delivering the serious "Birches," from his latest album, "Night Train," he declared that since few people read anymore, he and sometime collaborator Greg Brown were undertaking a 56-volume Philo/Rounder set based on "Moby Dick." He then offered a brief version of Kafka's "Metamorphosis," getting most of his associates to join

in a chorus concerning protagonist Gregor's sister bringing him "shit to eat."

But this was just a prelude for the irrepressible Cheryl Wheeler. In addition to material from her latest album, "Driving Home," Wheeler threw in "I Can't Watch TV," an uproarious new song bemoaning having to miss out on "bowling shows and guys fishin'," not to mention numerous beloved infomercials—all because her set was on the blink. She later informed listeners that there had to be something wrong with them for staying out so late.

JIM BESSMAN

EMMYLOU HARRIS AND THE NASH RAMBLERS RIDERS IN THE SKY

Beacon Theater, New York

IF EMMYLOU HARRIS wasn't already president of the Country Music Foundation board of trustees, her re-

cent performance at the Beacon Theater in New York was more than enough to qualify her.

Drawing mostly from her own repertoire, Harris and her top-notch band, the Nash Ramblers, satisfied her older fans and secured her place with her new ones, with the unpretentious, traditionally styled country/folk music that she is known for (and that has won her six Grammys).

The two numbers Harris performed from her latest Asylum album, "Cowgirl's Prayer"—nestled as they were amid classics from her nearly 20-year career—made it apparent that she is as vibrant as ever. The self-penned "Prayer In Open D," in particular, revealed an artist who continues to nurture her talent.

As expected, Harris' unequaled

ability to express vulnerability was best appreciated on the sorrowful ballads and soft shuffles. The smoldering urgency of her distinctive voice made standards like "Making Believe," "One Of These Days," and "Wheels" sound as though they were being sung for the first time.

Proving that acoustic bands can rock as a rule rather than as an exception, the versatile Nash Ramblers had no trouble engaging the crowd. Noteworthy for their fine harmonies and deft solos, this group, made up mostly of veterans of the country-connected scene, displayed its rhythmic punch on songs like "Mystery Train" and the funky bluegrass tune "Walls Of Time."

Opening act Riders In The Sky proved to be cowboy singers extraor-

dinaire, with their exuberance and good humor matched by their musical sense. Imagine a cowboy riding into town and conversing in nothing but palindromes like "Do Geese See God," and having it all make sense as a good song to boot, and that pretty much sums up the essence of Riders In The Sky.

The closest thing to a production number during the evening came when Harris brought Riders In The Sky out for the energetic three-song encore. Even the Riders' Too Slim could not keep up with the indefatigable Harris as she did her trademark buck dancing during the finale of Hank Williams' classic "Jambalaya."

TERRI HORAK

RHINO UNDAUNTED BY NRBQ CHALLENGE

(Continued from page 12)

"We're hoping to have a lot more radio success than in the past, starting with 'A Little Bit Of Bad,' such a memorable and catchy song that hopefully will appeal to both adult alternative and album rock stations," Fooks adds. "Hopefully, Atlantic's staff will help us at radio, but we're of course also playing up NRBQ's incredible live performances as much as possible—that it's an adventure going to an NRBQ show."

Recognizing that the colorful band's live and recorded performances carry the high level of humor suggested by the new album's title, Fooks still expects to play down that comedic aspect. However, a potential tag line like "semi-legendary for over 25 years" will convey the band's immense personality, as will a four-part postcard campaign going out to radio, retail, and press. Also going out is an advance picture CD.

"We're trying to play up that they're great musicians and songwriters, and this is the best record they've ever made, with more hooky songs than ever," he says. "Message For The Mess Age," he adds, is tailor-made for unusual tie-ins like "Girl Scout Cookies" and "Designated Driver," which may be proposed to the Girl Scouts and Mothers Against Drunk Driving, respectively.

Rhino's interest in NRBQ actually started in 1990, when it reissued the band's 1983 Bearsville album "Grooves In Orbit." According to Stewart, the band was heavily involved in that reissue, as well as in Rhino's 1991 two-disc anthology "Peek-A-Boo: The Best of NRBQ, 1969-1989."

"We worked very hard at songwriting and selection in making this record, and returned to a more direct, organic production," says Stewart. "They're not a band you can A&R in the traditional sense, because they've been around the block and have their own inertia that you have to work with in a positive way, or you come up against a brick wall!"

Keyboardist Terry Adams, who goes back the full 25 years with Spampinato (the current lineup, including guitarist Al Anderson and drummer Tom Ardolino, has been together 20 years), agrees that the songwriting is especially strong this time out. "As long as Joey and I've been together, we had co-written only two songs which were rec-

orded," he says. "It's always been 'every man for himself,' but this time we co-wrote six songs, which makes it very special for me."

For Adams, who also appears in Robert Altman's movie "Short Cuts," "Message For A Mess Age" is also special in that it features the last session by the late tenor saxophonist Gary Windo, with whom he once played in the Carla Bley Band, on Adams' enchanting tribute to his partner, "Span-

pinato."

Lastly, the album is special because it was recorded live. "It does what music is supposed to do spiritually," says Adams. "You can tell everybody's playing together and really smokin'. A lot of times today, record companies lose track of what a band really is, with models and dancers and stuff like that. Get this record and hear what a band really is!"

| AMUSEMENT BUSINESS® | | | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| BOXSCORE TOP 10 CONCERT GROSSES | | | | | |
| ARTIST(S) | Venue | Date(s) | Gross Ticket Price(s) | Attendance Capacity | Promoter |
| BILLY JOEL | Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum Uniondale, N.Y. | Dec. 29, 31, Jan. 2, 6, 8 | \$2,874,480 \$39.50/ \$29.50 | 91,500 five sellouts | Delsener/Slater Enterprises |
| JANET JACKSON TONY TONI TONE | Madison Square Garden New York | Dec. 17-18 | \$1,097,805 \$50/ \$35 | 29,242 two sellouts | Delsener/Slater Enterprises Haymon Entertainment Sun Song Prods. |
| JANET JACKSON TONY TONI TONE | Madison Square Garden New York | Dec. 31 | \$838,500 \$75/ \$50 | 15,472 sellout | Delsener/Slater Enterprises Haymon Entertainment Sun Song Prods. |
| MAZE FEATURING FRANKIE BEVERLY TONI BRAXTON | USAir Arena Landover, Md. | Jan. 2 | \$414,932 \$29 | 15,000 sellout | Dimensions Unlimited |
| JANET JACKSON TONY TONI TONE | Charlotte Coliseum Charlotte, N.C. | Jan. 9 | \$332,972 \$27.75 | 11,999 23,302 | Haymon Entertainment |
| JUBILATE: BILL GAITHER TRIO MICHAEL ENGLISH BARBIE MASON, MARK LOWRY 4HIM, THE CATHEDRALS | Charlotte Coliseum Charlotte, N.C. | Dec. 31 | \$300,290 \$24.50/ \$15.50 | 18,617 24,538 | Gaither Management Group |
| LUTHER VANDROSS OLETA ADAMS LOUIS DIX | San Diego Sports Arena San Diego | Jan. 9 | \$223,710 \$45/ \$30/ \$20 | 6,212 12,765 | Bill Silva Presents Cee-Jay Inc. |
| JANET JACKSON TONY TONI TONE | Coliseum, Birmingham-Jefferson Civic Center Birmingham, Ala. | Jan. 12 | \$212,288 \$27.75 | 7,650 10,846 | Haymon Entertainment |
| MICHAEL BOLTON JOHN PINETTE | Mark Eless Arena, Trump Taj Mahal Atlantic City, N.J. | Jan. 8 | \$198,550 \$65/ \$45/ \$35 | 4,698 sellout | Larry Magid Services |
| LUTHER VANDROSS OLETA ADAMS | Mark Eless Arena, Trump Taj Mahal Atlantic City, N.J. | Dec. 29 | \$183,410 \$50/ \$40 | 4,367 sellout | Larry Magid Services |

Copyrighted and compiled by Amusement Business, a publication of BPI Communications. Boxscores should be submitted to: Marie Ratliff, Nashville. Phone: (615)-321-4295, Fax: (615)-327-1575. For research information and pricing, call Marie Ratliff, (615)-321-4295.

