

PERFORMANCE

His first band since King Crimson

Robert Fripp returns to form

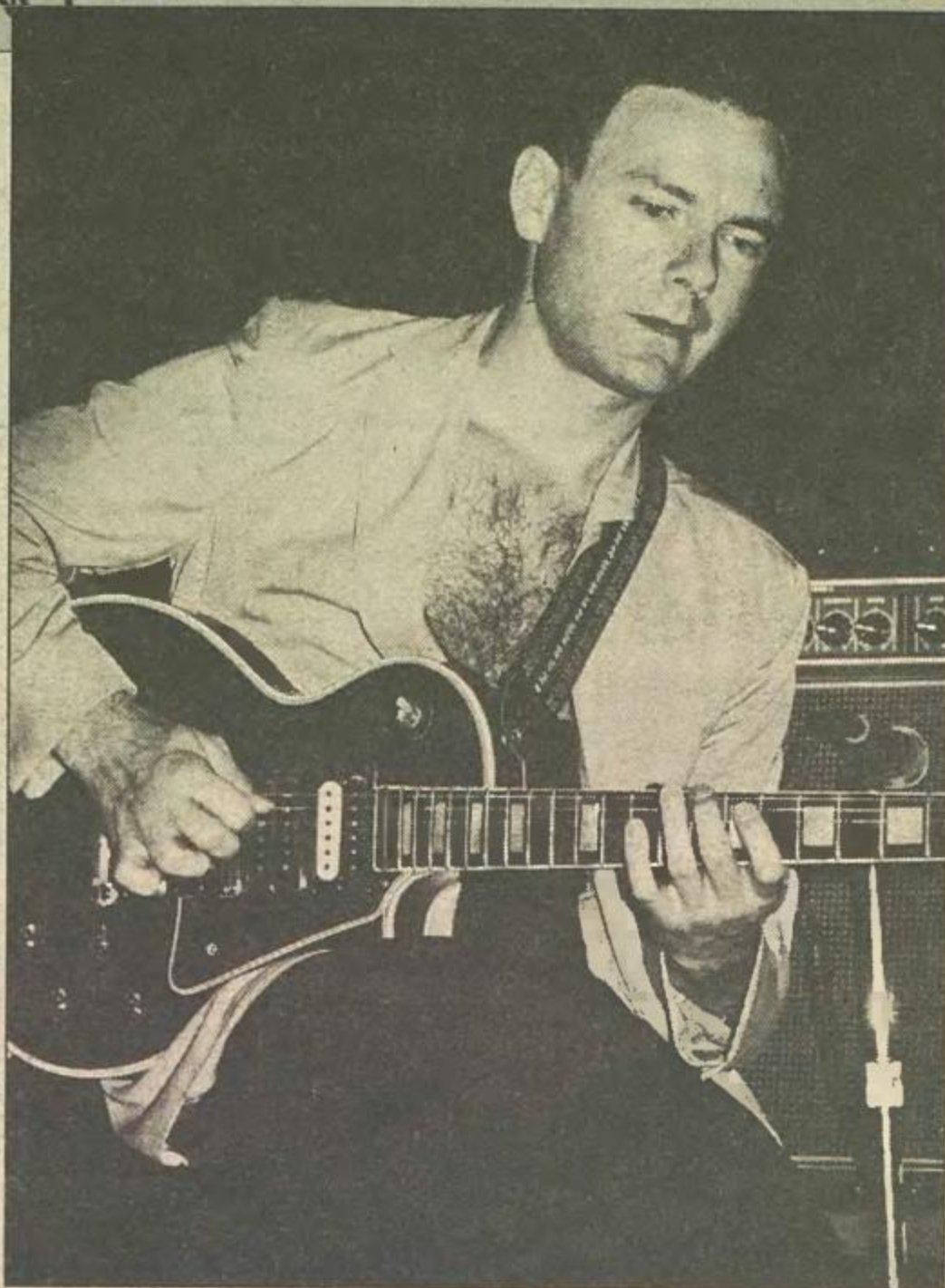
The League of Gentlemen
Irving Plaza
New York City
June 28th, 1980

By Kurt Loder

WELCOME TO the League of Gentlemen," announced Robert Fripp, looking uncharacteristically casual in a sand-colored suit jacket sans shirt. "This is yet another improbable event, full of hazard. We suggest that you listen and dance simultaneously."

The instruction was hardly necessary. As Fripp and organist Barry Andrews locked gazes across the small Irving Plaza stage, the four-piece League (with Sara Lee on bass and Jonny Toobad on drums) burst into "Inductive Resonance," a dance riff hot enough to heat up a corpse. The sell-out crowd stomped and leaped along from the opening salvo, and as Fripp and his first band in six years scorched their way through such instrumentals as "Youth at Piano," "Eye Needles" and even "Ooh! Mr. Fripp" (he *does* have a sense of humor), it quickly became apparent that Robert Fripp is still quite likely the most innovative and exciting guitar technician in rock.

It's been a long wait for fans of Fripp's fire-breathing work with King Crimson. After Fripp disbanded the seminal English art-rock group in 1974, he withdrew from the stage and immersed himself in Gurdjieffian philosophical pursuits and scattered production and session work. Then earlier this year, after recording two solo albums, Fripp, perhaps inspired by such New York funk bands as the Contortions and Defunkt, assembled a dance band. He recruited former XTC keyboardist Barry Andrews (who played on Fripp's *Exposure* LP) and discovered Lee and Toobad in a London band called Baby and the Black Spots. They all help compose the music and at this early stage



Fripp: rock's most innovative guitar technician?

sound extremely promising.

The League is very new, though, and the first of their two shows in New York reportedly was a disappointment for both artists and audience. But on Saturday, they seemed like a marvelously limber and sinuous unit. Although there was no singing, each brief tune was based on distinct and clearly delineated ideas, making the effect continuously stimulating.

Lee, who suggests a red-haired Rita Tushingham, played with a power and fullness of tone that recalled the muscular style of John Wetton, the last King Crimson bassist; Toobad, who resembles Ralph Nader, proved an equally gutsy percussionist. Over top of this rock-solid bottom, Fripp, seated before his custom foot-pedal board, and the brush-cut, unshaved Andrews, using a straight Crumar organ, spewed a geyser of dense, widely modulated ensemble

work that was especially impressive during their sorties into very high registers, where they cavorted with stunning precision. Fripp's immaculately controlled guitar was a gleaming, tubular presence in the music; only once, on a tune called "Thrang Perboral Gozinblux," did he step out with one of his soaring trademark solos. Otherwise, there was little improvisation in the playing, but the complex pieces were brilliantly worked out and consistently unpredictable, and the rhythms were definitely dance-worthy.

Although uninclined by nature, Robert Fripp is a true rock guitar star. With Jeff Beck still toiling in the jazz-fusion idiom, Fripp now has a shot at gaining broad recognition in the League of Gentlemen. The group may eventually record, and judging from this show, that should be something to hear.

Calendar

AC/DC: Nashville, TN (8/20); Lakeland, FL (8/22); West Palm Beach, FL (8/23); Jacksonville, FL (8/24); Houston, TX (8/26); San Antonio, TX (8/29); Dallas, TX (8/30); Amarillo, TX (8/31); El Paso, TX (9/1); San Bernardino, CA (9/3); Long Beach, CA (9/4).
Joan Armatrading: Chicago, IL (8/21); Detroit, MI (8/22,23); Seattle, WA (8/25); Spokane, WA (8/26); Portland, OR (8/27); San Francisco, CA (8/28-9/1); Los Angeles, CA (9/3).
Jeff Beck: Portland, OR (8/29); Eugene, OR (8/30); Spokane, WA (8/31).
Doobie Brothers: Ottawa, CAN (8/23); Quebec, CAN (8/24); Toronto, CAN (8/25); Rochester, NY (8/26); Charleston, WV (8/28); Pittsburgh, PA (8/29); Forest Hills, NY (8/30); Belmar, NJ (8/31); Allentown, PA (9/1).
Hall and Oates: Boston, MA (8/19);

Bethlehem, PA (8/20); North Tonawanda, NY (8/21); Pittsburgh, PA (8/22); NYC (8/23).

Robin Lane and the Chartbusters: Shirley, MA (8/23).

Pretenders: NYC (8/30)

Rossington-Collins Band: Poughkeepsie, NY (8/20); Waterbury, CT (8/22); Cape Cod, MA (8/23); Springfield, MA (8/24); Holmdel, NJ (8/26).

Talking Heads: NYC (8/27).

James Taylor: Cuyahoga Falls, OH (8/19,20); Toronto, CAN (8/22); Binghamton, NY (8/23); Newport, RI (8/24); Saratoga Springs, NY (8/25); Lenox, MA (8/26); Philadelphia, PA (8/28); Columbia, MD (8/29,30).

Yes: Toronto, CAN (8/29); Montreal, CAN (8/30); Hartford, CT (9/1); Portland, ME (9/2); NYC (9/4).

ZZ Top: Clarkston, MI (8/20,21); Edwardsville, IL (8/23); East Troy, WI (8/30,31).

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' star trip

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers
Poplar Creek Music Theatre
Hoffman Estates, Illinois
June 18th, 1980

By Lloyd Sachs

ILLUMINATED BY A steady white spotlight, Tom Petty's lean, chiseled face and shiny blond hair took on an almost angelic quality at Poplar Creek, the immaculate new open-air amphitheater near Chicago. That image certainly jived with the adoring reception he got from the throng of fans in attendance: simply stated, not only did Petty and the Heartbreakers *not* have to prove it all night, they didn't really have to prove it at all.

From the opening chords of "Shadow of a Doubt," this performance was a classic star-turn, with enough faithfully recreated album hits to satisfy audience expectations, enough heels-against-ass leaps and Roadrunner scampers along the edge of the stage to keep the crowd fired up and enough mock theatrics to charm them. In comparison to the quasi-punk wise-guy antics Petty once brought to his concerts, the relative smoothness and shrewd control that now mark his shows are something of an improvement. But the change hasn't cut down much of the distance he maintains between himself and his followers. Referring to his second album, *You're Gonna Get It*, Petty once remarked that it sounded

like there was a sheet of glass between us and whoever we were singing to." That appraisal also applied to the Poplar Creek show.

With the exception of a fairly uninteresting new ballad, "The Best of Everything," and one or two other songs, this was the same set the band played on their winter tour. During their last visit to Chicago, Petty coaxed a soaring, electric performance out of the Heartbreakers. Guitarist Mike Campbell's clean, cutting leads mixed with Belmont Tench's street-tough organ work to make such old war-horses as "American Girl" and "Breakdown" sound vibrantly new. And Petty's singing was so urgent he hardly seemed to come up for air.

This time, though, that kind of intensity didn't arrive until the tail end of the show, when a spirited "Shout" brought things to life. Petty has a tendency to drag that R&B classic out too much, but on this occasion he kept it crisp and sweet. Then the band really cut loose, ripping through encores of "Stranger in the Night" and "Century City" with a playfulness that kept one from dwelling on how Sixties-derivative much of the Heartbreakers' music is.



Petty: controlled but distant

lights was the way in which Petty and Campbell traded licks from opposite ends of the stage: facing each other in the best of spirits, they entered into a brief musical communion that transcended everything that had preceded it. Freed for a moment from the star-making (and sustaining) machinery, Petty actually seemed to be having a good time.