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Sharon Van Etten at Lincoln Hall | Live review and photo gallery

Posted in Audio File blog by Gavin Paul on Apr 13, 2011 at 12:36pm



Sharon Van Etten, In Tall Buildings, The Little Scream Ryan Bourque

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Continuing to ache something comfortably numb like every singer/songwriter worth an amp before her, Brooklyn-by-way-of -Memphis-by-way-of-Jersey darling of catharsis Sharon Van Etten stopped by Lincoln Hall last Saturday night (April 9th), headlining her first stage in Chicago since dropping last fall's move to full band opus, Epic.

Unusually shy and slim on banter, even for her bedroom-cathedral self, Etten drew some laughs from a Rod Stewart jab, and later again with another aimed at Robert Plant, thanking an café-quiet crowd for not attending those legend's shows happening across town. But otherwise, she cut words short and sweet, hugging her full-curve Cherry Gibson of choice like a book of ex-lovers' letters. She songbirded plugged-in intros spread across material from her classical guitar and 4-track demos as well as a handful of new ditties, her band kicking in routinely with soulful strides.

She may be coddled for her perceived timidity, but the woman's starting to realize her power as an artist. In one of the more awkward moments of the night, she chopped a shout-out to all her "blasts from the past" (high-school friends in tow) and went on to just "play a song," erupting like a spurned warrior on a new tune about "digging your own grave," and employing her first use of aggression with a searing "buried in masculine pain" lyric. Likewise with a Chess-era "Tornado" redux off her debut Because I was in Love earlier on, she opted for heel-stomping bluesy sass behind a tumbling cymbal ride. She threw in a little punk snarl with a dragged out "look into my eyes" lyric on her first encore number.

None of this jammed her future as hard, though, as a Fine Young Cannibals ode the budding threat claimed to have churned out the day of the show, inviting tourmates Little Scream to come up on stage and triple the angelic hum around a harmonium, both the SVE and LS drummers clobbered a backbone as Etten led an eerie doo-wop meets PJ Harvey drawl around "She drives me crazy," the Little Scream girls echoing "And I can't help myself." Timid my ass. She knows what she's doing.

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