

MIRAH AND THE BLOW
GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC HALL
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Popped on over to Babylon to catch Mirah and The Blow at the Great American Music Hall early this week. Long time readers know that over the course of ten years we have never given a bad review to any performer of the hundreds we have reviewed here.

This is the first.

The Blow consists of two people and remained largely forgettable. You want to forget them because they are so awful. The vocals were blurred out, indistinct and entirely unintelligible. The instrumentation was robotic and boring. The singer sang from the throat instead of deeper down, the instrumentation consisted of bleating "beats" and irrelevant loops and the guy banging away on low-tech percussion devices and nobody danced that we could see, although all the tables had been removed from downstairs. The duo apparently has a history of fragmentation, with the instrumentation portion splitting off to do something interesting, so that just leaves the singer, who seems badly in need of a few voice lessons.

Sporadic and overly kind applause greeted the fortunately brief opening set.

As for the singer. Forget her name. She is pretty. She has spunk. She has stage presence and she is obviously intelligent. Already she is head and

shoulders above fakirs like Lopez and Spears and about a thousand vapid voices, even though we have no interest in learning her name, but she definitely needs to get the vocal technicalities down. "Take a few lessons", someone said up in the balcony area.

And she better get at least her fans moving in something like dance if she plans on using "beats". To start with, Techno Sucks. Deal with it, girl, and now go out and learn how to perform, 'cause somebody who has paid forty bucks of good money for the GAMH, which is not exactly The Bottom of the Hill with five dollar admission, just has no patience for sitting through a learner's session.

It was sort of reminiscent of the Japanese bubble-gum pop that backdropped parts of the movie "Bladerunner". And was about as intelligible.

In an interview with the *SF Bay Guardian*, the lead singer admitted she does not think of herself as a musician and that her attempt to play the guitar on stage failed badly.

This Music business is savage and cruel; when you step on stage you need to **jump**, goddamn it. Its a business that regularly kills people for all the money that is in it and you need to act like your life is at stake when you get up there in front of a microphone, no matter who your friends are who got you there, or you will simply die. Tuesday night, The Blow didn't blow; it sucked.

Some advice: when singing a song, try hard to enunciate. Okay now, you go, girl.

Where the preceding act was novice-like and lacking, Mirah was experienced and, at times, far above a sometime unappreciative audience that

yacked and blathered over the set of a very accomplished artist doing stuff you don't get to hear on the radio, despite several appeals from the stage.



"I kind of feel the room is not entirely with me here. There seems to be a lack of focus . . .". Mirah said at one point. At another point, the artist said, "You know, it would be nice to be able to hear myself think."

This sort of thing seems to be happening more frequently of late, and might endanger Babylon's reputation as a plum gig to handle for distinguished artists. No performer of note wants to be traveling thousands of miles from home only be dumped on by a bunch of Marina douchbags blathering in the back rows, and the quality will dry up and entirely stop if this kind of thing continues.

We noted other people commenting on this throughout the Web.

Rodrigo y Gabriela are international stars on the acoustic circuit, hail from Mexico, and have any number of alternative venues at which to perform -- they certainly do not need 'Frisco with an attitude, and the last time they were here, they behaved graciously despite the outrageous obnoxiousness. But these guys are just not going to come back if treated like dirt and not given half a chance to perform. They don't need 'Frisco attitude -- they have enough money now, enough recognition around the world, and they can call their own shots and say f--k you to people who do not know how to welcome superlative musicians.

Nobody really wants to hear your stupid conversation about Muffy's stuffed poodle or your boring day at the coffee bar selling swampland to people from New Jersey. Not even the person who is facing you wants to listen to you; they are just acting interested. So you didn't pay for your ticket at GAMH? Other people did and they want to hear what they paid to hear. So f--k off yacking douchbags.

But maybe Babylon is just losing its luster, dropping its cool, and has decided to slough off into memories of the Glorious Times Past. It has become the City that Used to Know How, a provincial backwater washed in the wake of more important venues in New York and Boston and Austin.

Enough for that rant. Mirah is actually Mirah Yom Tov Zeitlyn, originally from Philadelphia, and she has been quietly spearheading a west coast renaissance of New Talent in the Indie-folk realm. Other reviewers have compared her soft soprano style to Cat Power, Azure Ray, April March, Edie Brickell, Liz Phair, and Juliana Hatfield.

She certainly would not be out of place at Lilith Fair.

Probably Hatfield is the best comparo for this rather unique artist, who seems bent on pursuing her own quirky vision rather than major label signing and Big Sales. Each album she has done since 1999 (about one a year) feels like a stage of artistic development, rather than an isolated work. Her last effort, *Share This Place*, included some serious Industry folks on the production end, but characteristically was idiosyncratically themed as songs about insects.

The songs, of which she did two at the GAMH, are surprisingly effective and workable as songs, contrary to all expectation. Her "Luminescence", ostensibly about fireflies, develops amazing associational power. A pedal steel, full jazz drumset, keyboards, cellist, and backup singer filled out her band while she did fairly elemental arrangements on an f-hole semi-hollow-body archtop with single pickup.

Mirah has experience and talent and intelligence and she is not bad to rest the eyes on either, despite her penchant for promo pix that make her look like the girl trying to major in Library Science. She also demonstrated a solid performer's savvy in taking control of a bad situation at GAMH, to turn the atmosphere around with a few rocky numbers that drowned out the Marina douchbags.

She obviously has a devoted following, but in her case, the following appears to be well earned through solid musicianship in addition to a spectral innocence and femininity sadly lacking in the Biz. In many ways, she reminds us of early Laurie Anderson with her intelligence and her quirkiness. We think she has a long way to go, especially towards achieving the dramatic "resolver note"

musically, and many of the songs feel undeveloped (also noted by other reviewers) but we think the ride will be a long, fruitful, and enjoyable one for someone already pretty well accomplished.

Keep your eyes and ears attuned to Mirah, for we think she will do very well indeed. Best wishes go with her and much love besides.