

THUNDER IN THE TOWN HALL

With 14 New Zealand dates sold out, there must be little doubt in Leo Sayer's mind that he's finally Made It Big.

Forget the US of A. Lots of acts have been a success there. But anyone who sells out in Napier must have something going for him. What is it?

In two words: Star Quality. If you prefer one word: Charisma.

Leo has both in sacksful. Small he may be, but his stage presence is awesome. From the moment he appears, people are eating from his hand. The only person I can recall provoking greater response was Rod Stewart, but then he had the whole of Western Springs to play with.

At heart, Leo is and will always be a clown. He wants to be laughed at. His inner makeup must contain a large portion of the court jester psyche. He plays the fool as though his very life depended on it.

His athletic stage movements are completely spontaneous and always entertaining. A simple thing like a faulty microphone has floored other performers of greater status. Not Leo. Three minutes of fooling around with wires, junction boxes and a screwdriver had the crowd in hysterics.

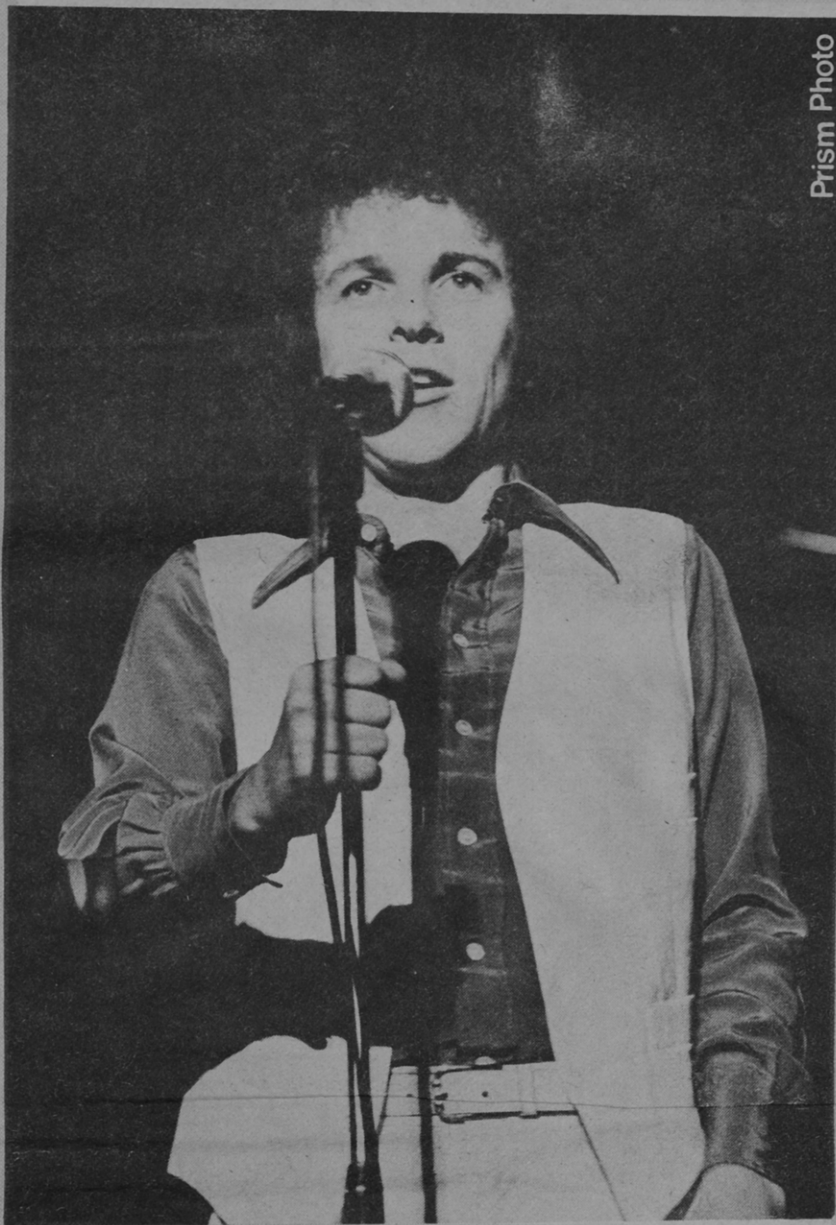
The show lasted little over an hour, but then Sayer is one of those entertainers who only has to give the crowd what they expect to satisfy, and the hits came thick and fast.

Only on stage do you realise just how good his voice is. Strong and clear, with a long range and useful falsetto, adaptability is the name of the game.

"Thunder In My Heart" and "Endless Flight" show the gritty side to its best advantage. "Easy to Love" gives the band a token spotlight, but more of that shortly. "You Make Me Feel Like Dancing" gets a big round of applause and allows more clowning.

The slow and serious numbers work surprisingly well. You could hear a pin drop during "Giving It All Away" and "When I Need You." Leo stands alone, looking vulnerable and in need of a friend. Luckily, his wife, Jan, is watching from the side of the stage, and he's not alone. Pure magic, those songs.

"Moonlighting" has always been my favourite Sayer song, even if it comes from what many consider his least favourite album, and even he considers it a rather rush job. It tells a great story, and he gives



Prism Photo

it that right touch of pathos on stage: two rather unattractive people to everyone except each other running away together for lack of something better to do. Pathetic but engrossing, and a classic song.

Seldom have I felt so in sympathy with a performer, urging him on to greater things. Leo Sayer is a true Star. I wish I could say the same for his band, my only grizzle.

Everything was very competent, very professional. Not a note out of place, not a foot wrong. No feeling, either. Commitment still means something, and the band might as well have been playing backup for Roger Whittaker, for all the emotion they showed.

Not that there was anything wrong with the backing. It's just that they didn't seem to even enjoy what they were doing. Each took a solo when Leo gave the cue, but they'd obviously done it a hundred times before and it gave them no pleasure. In general, they left Leo to carry the can front stage, and treated him like tolerant uncles of an unruly but lovable nephew.

It saddens me to see this negative aspect of professionalism in music. It's all very nice that Leo can get the best to back him, and these guys were very good. I just wish they'd occasionally showed some enjoyment of what they were doing... instead of looking like people out to do their job, collect the money, and think of how much they'll cut off their mortgage.

Only drummer Frank Gibson seemed to be happy but then he's a hometown boy and is obviously overjoyed to have got where he is. I hope he retains that feel.

Anyway, you can't argue with a full house, and Stewart MacPherson would doubtless agree. Leo Sayer is a first class entertainer, and sent a lot of people away very happy. More power to him. There are many others who could learn much from him.

I cannot close without giving mention here to Sharon O'Neill. She's obviously out to capture the substantial Linda Ronstadt market here, and judging by her support performance, she can't help but succeed. She has the songs, she has the band. Most impressive, and one of the best warm-up acts I've seen in many a day. Attention please, all ye who could make Sharon a very popular lady.

Duncan Campbell

THE BLUES ROCKS BACK



The blues, often regarded as music of solitary expression, has yielded some fruitful alliances. Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, Junior Wells and Buddy Guy, Sleepy John Estes and Hammy Nixon. Now Muddy Waters, the King of Chicago Blues, and Johnny Winter, fast fingered Texan guitar throtter, link arms to breathe new vigour into a form that even die hard enthusiasts feared was a thing of the past.

Last year Muddy Waters joined forces with Winter to deliver *Hard Again*, the most powerful blues album of the seventies and a rejuvenation for Muddy. Now 63 year old

Muddy Waters and 34 year old Johnny Winter present their second collaboration, *I'm Ready*. The CBS album is easily the equal of its predecessor.

Once again, Waters' collaborators are a stellar crew. Apart from Winter, who plays with restraint throughout, there's Pinetop Perkins (piano) and Willie "Big Eyes" Smith (drums) from *Hard Again*. Guitarist Bob Margolin switches to bass and the second guitar seat is taken by Jimmy Rogers, one of Waters' most outstanding 50s' sidemen. Replacing James Cotton on harp are Big Walter Horton, a veteran of the

Chicago blues scene, and Jerry Portnoy, who, like Margolin, was in the last Waters' band that toured New Zealand.

This congregation of heavyweights doesn't play on every track — the album has a thoughtful variety of tone and mood — but when everyone is in there the kitchen gets hot. Winter may be the ideal sideman for Waters, the sting of the younger man's guitar echoing the master's sure phrasing, and the harp duelling of Walter and Portnoy is sheer inspiration.

Hard Again wasn't half bad, but Winter seems more at ease as producer this time out. On the earlier album the instruments seemed crammed up to the front of the speakers. There seems more space here.

The songs are a mixture of old and new. There are superb remakes of such Waters' standards as "I'm Ready," "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Screamin' and Cryin'". B.B. King's "Rock Me" (although Muddy gets the composer credit) and Sonny Boy Williamson's "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" also get the treatment. The new songs are solidly in the Waters' mainstream.

A big extra is a more than fair lashing of that keening slide guitar that Muddy made his trademark before age and ill-health forced a slowing down. The association with Johnny Winter seems to have shed years from Muddy. The verve of these recordings bears no comparison to the oft-times torpid perfunctoriness of his later recordings with Chess.

Rick Derringer, Winter's former guitar partner, sums it up: "What I liked about Muddy and Johnny together wasn't how good Johnny was playing, but just the fact that when Muddy was on the stage with Johnny he was incredibly alive and aware and energetic."

"If you ask Muddy, 'Which out of the young rock and roll guys turns you on?' he'd say, 'My favourite one is that Johnny Winter,' and Johnny'd tell you that his all-



Waters and Winter

time idol — living, at least — is Muddy Waters. So when they get together it's a real two way thing. That's why they work good."

At an age when most men have given it away, or at least slowed down, Muddy Waters sounds as if he could strut on forever. And Johnny Winter is the catalyst in this formula of funk.

Muddy Waters: "I met Johnny a few years ago in Texas. He didn't have the big contract then and he wasn't a big rock and roll star. He was playin' so much of the old stuff... all the old blues players like me and Jimmy Rogers and a lot more. He was playin' all of our stuff."

"I figured that this was the greatest chance (the opportunity to work with Winter), man, of all my days, to get with someone who's still got it, got that early 50s sound."

Ken Williams