

Good and rough but not so ready

THE New Roger Lucey image — of shorter hair and zappier style — cannot camouflage the man inside who is storming with a sensitivity about his surroundings.

In some ways, the two persona are incompatible, for rock 'n roll is a format derived of first world style, while Lucey is plugged directly into what's happening in this third part of the world which some people think of as a constellation, but which Lucey surveys mostly with consternation.

I still believe Roger Lucey is the most important white rock performer we have in this country, but I would not have used last night's concert to try and prove it to anyone else.

There are two levels to this: Roger Lucey, the man of ideas, of passion, of outright statements with no fear or compromise, was on that stage all right... but as a concert the show did not fly all that well.

There were soaring moments to be sure. Lucey can really switch it on sometimes, and the new band goes like a jet, but it doesn't happen all the time.

ROCK

Patrick Lee

Roger Lucey Band
Market Theatre

They opened powerfully on "Windy Days" but that tight energy slipped away sometimes, and left Lucey with a heavy job alone in front of a band which was completely devoid of movement.

Admittedly they had their performance rhythm thrown twice by sound breakdowns, but there were flat periods other than that. The constant switching to Jethro Butow's lead guitar breaks, for instance, became a predictable and unstimulating format.

Lucey and the band also suffered from the fact that the Market is an awkward venue for a big-sound rock band which needs more elevation, better sound and better lighting.

Lucey trades in rough-hewn ideas and presents them with a conviction and a confidence that is stunning for someone who has so little of the usual

media support which props up so-called stars. He is completely at home on the stage. But that does not mean he is at ease: On the contrary. He surges around all the available space to vent his anger.

Here again Lucey's style is an unusual combination of resources. In attitude, he is most like the new wave musicians, trying to instigate some re-evaluation of their society; but his musical style is far from new wave, and is most like the Bob Seeger/Bruce Springsteen rock style.

Simply, Roger Lucey did not do himself justice last night. All the ideas were there. The commitment. And energy to spare. But it just didn't click totally.

Regrettably his career has had more gaps than work in it in the recent past, and perhaps the lack of on-the-job expertise is showing.

This is measuring by the highest standards: Roger Lucey sets them for himself, and, on another night, he will achieve them.

I have no doubt that given a reasonable time together, these guys could make up the strongest rock team in the country, with Butow's devastating lead guitar at the focal point.

Era, a nine-member Cape-based "Afro-rock" band, opened the show with a short, competent set. Stompie Mavi, who led the proceedings with an incongruously naive style, sang well but the band's real magic lies in the brass section who took a rousing encore.



Snappy, dynamic Lucey

By MUFF ANDERSSON

ROGER Lucey has a new glitter-kid image that seems incongruous with the ideas he presents through his lyrics and music.

It was slightly off-putting seeing this naturally powerful frontperson preening and prancing, stalking backwards and forwards across the stage like an angry lion and generally giving us a rock-star trip for the first third of his set at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg this week.

Maybe he was nervous — it was opening night, the sound packed up during one number and the support band Era had arrived half an hour late — but

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it was a great relief when he settled down after a few numbers and became a musician instead of a star.

Not just a great relief, but great altogether. He's a dynamic performer when he's not trying too hard.

He has a rough, clear voice that commands attention.

Lucey is an excellent songwriter too, combining snappy melodies with hard-hitting lyrics that actually mean something in this society.

Personal highlights were the chilling "Thabane"; "Crossroads"; a ballad written by

Cape Town songwriter David Kramer called "Dry Wine", and the amusing "Spy's Eyes" (written about Craig Williamson).

His band could not have been better, though sizzling lead guitarist Jethrow Butow and bassist Les Goode have yet to shake off the onstage inertia built into them from years spent in the studios.

Era, who played the first half of the concert, have an exceptional brass section which unfortunately falls into disuse when Stompie Mavi sings up front.

Mavi's Korsten-like tenor would be better suited to Gilbert and Sullivan than the Afro-jazz material Era perform.

Back in SA, Roger finds a new direction

Roger Lucey is back in Johannesburg with a headful of plans.

After his success at the Jo'burg Music Festival last July, Roger left for Europe and America to have a look at the scene there and to take up the offer to audition for Manfred Mann's Earth Band.

The Earth Band thing failed to take root, not because Roger wasn't any good, but because Manfred believed that an artist of Roger's calibre, with his distinct personality and style, should form his own outfit.

"Besides, I didn't feel like being tied down for four years," Roger said over tea.

Together with a newly formed backing group featuring people like Jethro Butow and Les Goode, Roger took the stage at the Market Theatre last night for what was, in effect, his first major concert appearance since his return in February.



● Roger Lucey.

And, he hopes, this will be the start of a series of countrywide concerts which will culminate in a new album and an American concert tour next year.

On his debut album project, 3rd Ear Music, Dave Marks's company

distributed the album. It was privately sponsored.

This time, however, Roger is obviously seeking a sound deal, knowing that people in America who heard his demo work were impressed.

He feels, having just savoured overseas trends, that his new direction will be far more energetic, his leanings more to reggae and rock and his technical approach more advanced.

The attitude with a lot of the muzos around here, he said, is that they're just playing music — "Let's turn our back on the audience — what the hell, it's still the same sound."

"It simply doesn't work over there," said Roger.

I have no use for him. It doesn't work here either.