

LIVE



Feargal Sharkey photo by Neil A Jeffries

◀ YIVA! FESTIVAL, NEC, BIRMINGHAM

There were a lot of bleeding hearts at the NEC on Saturday, as 6,000 people crowded into the stadium to oppose apartheid in the Yiva! festival. ('Yiva' means 'listen' in African.)

Po-faced politicians, **Latin Quarter**, were typical of the worst aspects of the day. Their bastardised reggae peppered with references to the Guardian foreign news columns left the bars full. But for backfiring on all cylinders, **Jeremy Irons** hectoring, melodramatic speech was perfect. To cries of "Push off back to Stratford", Jeremy quoted from Thomas Jefferson and pompously asked for one minute's silence for South African detainees. A section of the audience took this opportunity to comment on the event's main compere with a cry of "Simon Bates — you're a wanker" which was roundly applauded.

Half Man Half Biscuit, for all their fun time lyrics, are as much fun as a smack in the face with a bag of wet sugar. **Balaam And The Angel** were loud, boring and hairy, despite the undoubted promise of being from nearby Cannock.

The best bands expressed their political passions by simply being there, not preaching. **The Pogues** — fast, drunk and furious — tore through their set of mostly old numbers, playing 'Dirty Old Town' for Birmingham. **Elvis Costello**, watched girlfriend **Cait** from the wings, disappointed a few by not coming on, but was well represented by **Winston Reedy's** version of 'Every Day I Write The Book'. Winston's cover, which has exactly the same vocal phrasing as the original, is released as a single this week. With the only all-black band of the day, Winston Reedy played elegant, straightforward reggae with the minimum of strain and the maximum of warmth.

The **Ruby Turner Band** came onstage to a barrage of bottles. I've never seen anyone look as pleased as she did to get a half of Arena lager full in the face, but Ruby Turner took it all with a smile and belted out an unremarkable set of tunes which she's been playing for two or three years now.

Buddy Curtess And The Grasshoppers looked like bouncing boiled sweets in candy-coloured suits, sync-bopping to time-warped Fifties nostalgia which was hugely popular with an audience trying to escape the 'Eighties sound of the hugely awful **New Model Army**.

Feargal Sharkey, a dream in white cotton, started his set with 'You Little Thief' and delivered the rest with his now familiar post-Undertones polish. Alone for 'When A Man Loves A Woman', his soaring, sublime voice was lost in the huge arena, but a blockbusting version of 'All Over Now' rounded off a brilliant if unsurprising set.

King, on their only British date this year, were disappointing and disappointed — since most of the audience went for the last bus after Feargal Sharkey. Starting with 'Won't You Hold My Hand Now', the teenybop screams which began with Feargal reached a crescendo as Paul King started his weird, narcissistic ballet. 'Don't Be Cruel' and 'Love And Pride' were followed by a right-on rendition of 'Racist Friend'. **Junior** joined Paul King onstage for a predictable 'Free Nelson Mandela' in a last-ditch attempt to stop the rush for taxis.

The best aspect of this musically disappointing day was the audience who, in donating £5 of their ticket price to the poor of South Africa, did themselves proud.

Kay Holmes