

Claude Jones Group Among Best in Rock

By WILLIAM HOLLAND

Star Staff Writer

Claude Jones is back at the Emergency. If this doesn't make complete sense to you, then you should hear this group, which has established itself as the best rock 'n' roll band in Washington.

Claude Jones is usually a sextet, but often it has seven or eight persons in the band, depending on the song. They're all at the Club Emergency in Georgetown this weekend.

Among the members are some of the most inventive, tasteful—well, the best rock instrumentalists in the area. Reggie Brisbane, who plays drums, always manages to draw the already tight sound of the band into a succinct knot, and Peter Blachy, who plays lead guitar (and is soon to leave the group to devote himself to yoga teaching) is just about good enough to step in and tour with any of the best groups. He was excellent when I first heard heard him more than a year ago, and he's twice as good now. Sometimes Clarence White comes to mind as I listen to his work, other times Robbie Robertson. That good.

Claude Jones still chooses perfect songs to sing, as it always has. If you remember Carl Smith's classic "Ubangi Stomp" you'll guess what I mean. They are, first of all, rock 'n' roll band. But then, when they do

Dylan's "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," you'd swear they're all roots-drenched good old boys from the Nashville studios.

Lead vocalist Joe Triplett's rendition of that song was beautiful. And beyond the sound, he doesn't seem to have the unbearable lead-vocalist ego trappings, so he's a pleasure to listen to, because there's little keeping you from the music except his unpretentious and often whimsical personality.

John Guernsey writes most of the songs for Claude Jones, and he, too, has to be the best rock songwriter in the area. He was playing electric piano last night, and I liked what I heard of his instrumental work.

His songs span the distance between classically-touched rock (reminiscent of Procol Harum) to country rock in "Goodnight" and "Darling If" to—believe it or not—polka rock (or something similar) in "King of Slang," a rollicking, whoop-and-holler number that has become closely associated with the band. Needless to say, the group does his songs excellently.

Claude Jones has had more than several lucrative and flattering chances to sign with big-name companies and record. They felt they weren't ready at the time, and they probably were right. They were "a good band, for Washington," which is like saying, in a correlative way, "a warm day for Siberia."

They showed good judgment. For, as good as they were a year ago, they're even better now, and their original material is top-notch. It shouldn't be long before they do decide to record (I hope Peter will be along) and the result should be, in Claude Jones lingo, outa sight.

The band will be playing through Sunday and sharing a Monday night benefit at Emergency with Nice, also a very good local group.

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