

CONCERT REVIEWS

Rickie Lee Jones

(UCLA's Royce Hall;
1,853 seats; \$23.50 top)

Promoted by Avalon Attractions in association with the UCLA Center for the Performing Arts. Band: Sal Bernardi, John Leftwich, Keith Fiddmont, Ed Mann.

The traditional jazz leanings Rickie Lee Jones hinted at in her last trip through town emerged full-blown and beautifully mounted in her Thursday show at UCLA's Royce Hall, first of two sold-out L.A. dates in her current tour.

Melancholy, reflective jazz standards from her new Geffen

album "Pop Pop" blended hauntingly with her strongest original compositions in sumptuous acoustic arrangements that indicated Jones can continue in this vein as long as she likes.

Jazz purists may carp about the crossover from pop, but Jones has been signaling this move as far back as her ambitious and difficult 1984 tour, when she tried out a couple of jazz standards to the dislike of a restless, rock 'n' roll crowd.

In this new incarnation, she finally gets to play in the respectful setting she's always ached for (not a single cry for her breakthrough pop single "Chuck E.'s in Love" was heard Thursday), and she's getting more playful and relaxed

in inverse proportion to the tone of her shows.

Always generous with the spotlight, Jones lets her sidemen start the current show and then joins for a confident "Bye Bye Blackbird," moving into personalized versions of "Second Time Around," "I'll Be Seeing You" and Fran Landesman's "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men."

Pristine acoustic showcasing of her uniquely flexible and expressive vocals, enhanced by Sal Bernardi's reedy, autumnal old-world accordion, was breathtaking at times, though it could be taken to precious extremes, as in the too-deliberate rendering of "Hi Lili, Hi Lo."

Ten of the tunes on "Pop Pop" were blended with standout originals like "The Last Chance Texaco," a stark and chilling "Coolsville" and a buoyant "It Must Be

Love," all emerging with brilliant clarity in this setting, their lyrics for once as distinctly audible as they deserve to be.

Show highlights included an exquisitely delicate vocal on Marty Balin's wistful "Comin' Back to Me," while the crowd seemed delighted by two impudently clever children's tunes — "I Won't Grow Up," from "Peter Pan," and "Dat Dere."

Adding to the rich, intimate coffeehouse atmosphere was the first-rate set design with its chocolatey lighting, period lamp shades and skewed-angle hanging windowpane.

Transitions are tricky, and Jones' crossover could have been "Pop Pop," fizz fizz for a lesser talent. It's a thought she seemed to acknowledge while adding a touch of theater to her intro to Landesman's "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most." "This is my crucial moment," she said as she self-consciously arranged a transformative gold-lame cowl around her head. "Did it work?" Admirably. —Amy Dawes