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Friday with Taj Mahal

By JOE DAVIDOW

Friday night at the Filmore-East was a night for blues fans to come out of their smoke-filled rooms with B. B. King records blasting, and hear some of the new sounds in blues, along with the Chicago-style blues. A new sound was being presented by a New York cat who doesn't think you have to come from down south to know where it's at. His name is Taj Mahal, and he sings and plays harp with equal talent. (For those of you who don't know about the blues, a harp is the affectionate term used for harmonica.)

Taj's style is different from all the blues sounds around today. Although his latest album, "The Natchel Blues," has quite a few guest musicians, this concert was given with his steady lead guitar, bass, and drum players. They developed the same big sound they had on the record, with the guitarist filling in the parts that were played on the album by a piano. The basic style is hard to describe, the main difference from others being in the rhythm and chord changes. Even his harp sounds different than the usual blues player, for he plays in chordal riffs, rather than lines, (again, lines are a series of singular notes played at certain intervals at a certain time, to get a certain sound).

Following Mahal was a man who has been underrated his entire musical life, the former harp player for the great Muddy Waters, James Cotton. Cotton, who was with Muddy for over ten years, left him around three

years ago and formed his own blues band. His sound is in the tradition of the great Chicago bands, except that it is amplified, as they all are now, all but a small segment of real down-home singing.

The band played all the blues numbers that everybody has heard, yet never tires of. Two of the favorites they did that aroused the crowd were "Gypsy Woman", and "Knock on Wood." These were completed by Cottons fiery harp playing, in which he gets a wa-wa effect by manipulating the mike. This contrasted with Taj Mahal's to make it a well-rounded night for harp players.

After Cotton finished, it was about 2:30; a tall blond chick Joni Mitchell came on a stage, and the whole place was ready to start all over again. Before she sang, the feeling of anticipation in the audience ran high.

She has the power of Joan Baez, with the flexibility of Laura Nyro. She writes all of the songs she sings, along with a lot of songs other people sing. She comes from Canada, makes anti-war remarks on stage, and is absolutely beautiful. The only song she didn't write was a popular song by Dino Valenti called, "Gonna love one another." She did it wonderfully, in her own charming, lightstyle, giving it a different shading than I've heard before.

With all that blues and fire coming from the stage during the first two groups, Joni and her guitar did it to the people at the Filmore, which just added to a night that was already made.