

En Vogue holds on to past, works on future

Nyla Pickett
Sentinel-Voice

Yes, that's right, they are still Holdin' On. Back in the days, before Star Search spawned at least one one-hit-wonder a month, before MTV, ABC and BET ran their wanna-be-a-pop-star-like contests; En Vogue hit and ramshacked the charts with their mix of talent, class, poise and grace and their sultry persona. Finally, there was an ensemble that rivaled the "girl groups" of the past- AND, they did it without baring themselves or belittling the image of the regal Black Woman.

So, where was Vegas to back up their comeback tour debut this past Saturday night at Sam's Town's Live venue? With less than a third of the venue filled, the ladies showed up and showed out- minus one and plus a replacement.

One could say they were nonetheless than they have ever been for presence and performance. Or, one could say that minus the glitter, sequins and evening gowns, En Vogue donned t-shirts and jeans and put their youngest musical rivals to shame with sheer musical prowess, power and incredible energy.

Dawn was absent, as she has been since loaning her vocals quite successfully to solo projects and, most recently, the eclectic Lucy Pearl. Maxine was not present, but sent her gracious greeting to the half-filled hall; Amanda, part of the newest edition, was a fantastic addition; and Terry Ellis was her charming self, rejoining the "sistahs" after her solo jaunt.

Unlike other bands that go through facelifts over the years, they have been able to maintain an integrity in their style and sound.



CINDY

They've not lost the incredibly symmetrical harmonizing that made them America's charismatic "Funky Divas."

Though the acoustics lacked a certain quality at the Live venue and the divas background vocals were obviously tracked, and though the resort seems to be somewhat confused as to what type of venue they are trying to create (the seating seems to change from event to event), the set itself proved strong enough to function as a comeback tour for some ladies who, once miked, seem like they never left.

Again, it is a shame that there was such a poor attempt at any public relations for this tour as the trio was in rare form. They neglected their newer material and stuck to their oldies, from the "Born To Sing," "Funky Diva" and "Runaway Love" albums. The diehards in attendance gave any packed house

market. They were, and are still able to carry the tune and the image. A smashing medley of cuts from their predecessors like Patti, The Emotions and Denise Williams further proved their ability to hold on to the backbone and soul that gave their careers the stellar launch it took in the mid-eighties.

Without a doubt, En Vogue will continue to hold on. Surely they are now among the new jack veterans of R&B history, and from what they displayed Saturday night, they have not stopped growing- and with any luck, they may have a long road to travel.



AMANDA

a run for its money, dancing in the aisles and whipping the group into a passionate performance with their unbridled appreciation.

As mentioned, these ladies were a product of a time when R&B was still primarily about who had the talent- not who could pull the



TERRY

Kitano, Epps become blood brothers in gruesome gang war shoot-em up

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Actor/writer/director Takeshi Kitano made a dozen of his trademark gangster films in his native Japan before now finally bringing his bloody brand of action to America. "Brother," filmed on location in Los Angeles, is the story of a mobster who is forced to leave Tokyo after he's betrayed by his gang.

After an unfortunate, violent encounter upon arrival which leaves a stranger scarred, tough guy Yamamoto (Kitano) turns a new leaf in his adopted homeland, where he is intent on tracking down his brother, Ken (Claude Maki). But his baby brother only introduces him to a new underworld involving drug-dealing American-style. Yamamoto, initially frustrated by the unfamiliar code of conduct, soon figures out what it takes to survive the strange environs.

After a round of routine run-ins with street hustlers, Yamamoto finds a formula that works for him that goes something like this: give me what I want or you die. He finds the perfect partner in the disfigured Denny (Omar Epps), because he's big, he's bad, he's black and he's back, despite taking a broken bottle to the face.

Along the way to wiping out the Chicano, Japanese and Mafia drug gangs, Yamamoto and Denny develop a bond thicker than blood. Their influence grows and the money flows as they indulge in wine, women, limousines and the finer things in life. But eventually, this perversion of the American Dream fitfully dissolves into super-realistic Greek tragedy. Enough splattered guts to make Sam Peckinpah puke and John Woo woozy.

Poor (1 star). Unrated but deserved an R for gruesome, pointless violence.

Serena

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launch the 90-minute set.

Needless to say, four days to prep a headlining 3-day run would lend a tremble to the average musician. Joseph, Linwood, Paul, Ken and Musical Director Cornell stepped up to the plate with the best lead guitar-sax-drum-bass guitar-keyboard and vocal backup, respectively, and with the dexterity of real musicians. Though a few pieces seemed speedily arranged- which distracted the listener from the fullness of Serena's range- this was easily countered by the perfectly sound melodies that followed.

It is without a doubt that Ms. Henry is on her way. Her motto is to "reach for the sky,



Henry croons for an appreciative crowd.
Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard
and chances are you'll fall among the stars." Well, keep on reaching Serena. Chances are you don't have far to go!

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