

ROCK

Del Amitri Hammersmith Odeon

WHEN so much of modern rock is either dance floor-adjusted or jangly whimsy, what a thrill to come across a band able to work fresh magic from an earlier, more soulful design.

Del Amitri started seven years ago as one of those arty Glaswegian bands travelling in the wake of the Smiths. Somewhere along the line it went to America, and members grew out their hair and applied a little rock 'n' roll grease to their Scot-pop roots. The result was an estimable album, *Waking Hours*, that hoisted the group into the Top 10 last February.

However, even that attractively crafted recording is not a patch on a live performance that brimmed with striking, concise melodies, swept along by an old-fashioned, push-and-pull rhythmic undertow and delivered with just the right modicum of unabashed showmanship.

Guitarist Iain Harvie plainly modelled his tone and playing style on the late Paul Kossoff, the outstandingly inventive guitarist with Free. Indeed, he even bore

something of a physical resemblance to Kossoff as he used his entire forearm to work a fierce vibrato or chopped out clean power chords with a mighty, upwards flourish.

At centre-stage Justin Currie, chief songwriter, vocalist and bass player, a man gifted with a perfect rock star mouth and jawline, projected a cheerfully obstreperous personality as he introduced numbers, including several new titles, in the often unfathomable accent of Europe's City of Culture.

The sound was mixed at a level that invited rather than forced the ear to listen and there was a gorgeous, relaxed swing to numbers like "Kiss This Thing Good-bye" and "Stone Cold Sober". At its rockiest, with "Scared to Live", Del Amitri made incursions into Bryan Adams's territory, but this was balanced by the acoustic, folky string to its bow emphasised on the biggest hits "Nothing Ever Happens" and "Spit in the Rain".

Laddish high spirits got the better of Del Amitri during an amateurish display of pub-rock bravado, when comedian Vic Reeves joined the group for a chaotic version of Free's "Ride on Pony". But until then this was the performance of a world-class act in the making.

DAVID SINCLAIR