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PERFORMANCE

MARY CUTRUFELLO

THE MINT

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HEARTLAND ROCK IS pretty much the stuff of truck commercials these days. Elsewhere, the gruff voices and surging guitars that in the Seventies and Eighties drove all night through the darkness on the edge of cornfields and factory towns, screaming "America," have been fairly scarce of late.

Not when Mary Cutrufello is onstage. Beneath her mop of dreadlocks and behind an infectious grin, the Connecticut-raised, Yale-degreed, Houston-based dynamo is the great hope for the form as we head to Y2K. At this cozy L.A. club, her croak of a voice often turning into a boisterous roar, she proved it all night—or at least during the hour in which she captivated the audience with energy and commitment.

She made no bones about which mold formed her, striking Springsteen-esque postures with her blond Telecaster, throwing Bruce's own "Darkness on the Edge of Town" into the set and, for that touch of authenticity, including former E Street organist Danny Federici among her three sidemen. Still, she has filtered the Springsteen influence through

her own life. Such songs as "Miss You #3" and "Sunny Day" breathe country air à la Steve Earle at his rockiest. And her lyrics draw as much from personal experiences (both "Sad Sad World" and "Sister Cecil" affectionately honor her younger sibling) as they do from heartland iconography. Meet the new Boss? Give her time for growth and we'll see.

—STEVE HOCHMAN



The future of heartland rock? Mary Cutrufello