

# GET ON THE SOUL TRAIN

Four acts bring some steamin' R&B to New York BY MICHAEL GILTZ

**A**merican Idol" winner Taylor Hicks has been shouting about the "soul patrol" ever since he first popped up on television. But in the next few weeks, a range of acts will bring some bona fide R&B and soul music to Manhattan.

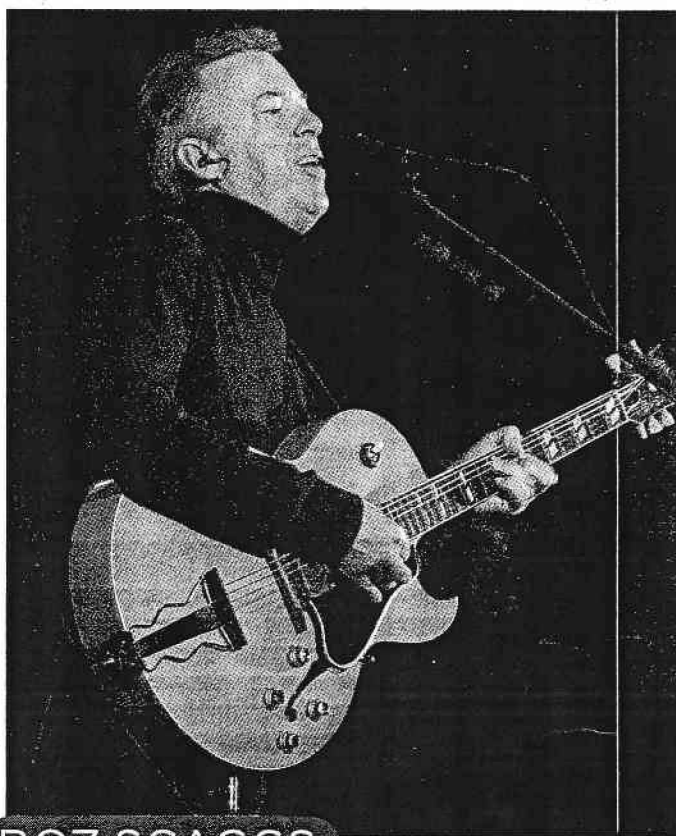
Legendary singer Candi Staton presents her quietly powerful singing at the Bowery Ballroom (6 Delancey St., 212-533-2111) this Wednesday, Aug. 9, hot on the heels of her acclaimed comeback album, "His Hands."

Boz Scaggs will head a terrific double bill at Town Hall (123 W. 43rd St., 212-840-2824) on Aug. 15 with British soul singer James Hunter. Scaggs is still glowing from the acclaim for his jazz standards CD, "But

Beautiful," and he's in great voice and sure to include older hits, including the many classics ("Georgia," "Lido Shuffle," "What Can I Say") from his 1976 masterpiece, "Silk Degrees."

Hunter is a journeyman soul singer in the style of Sam Cooke who has suddenly broken through with his third CD, "People Gonna Talk." It's the first that's been successful enough for Hunter to hopefully stop working his day jobs for good.

And Corinne Bailey Rae tops it all off with a triumphant return to the city at Webster Hall (125 E. 11th St., 212-353-1600) on Aug. 23. The young Rae's delightful first album is one of the year's big success stories, debuting at No. 1 in the U.K. and enjoying word of mouth in the States that's kept it hovering in the Top 20.



BOZ SCAGGS

Boz Scaggs is just starting to dig deeper. The 62-year-old singer has had every type of success. As a kid, he took his guitar and sang for his supper on the streets of London and Bombay. Dressed to the nines, he went to San Francisco during the Summer of Love (people thought he was a narc) and sang on the first two albums of the Steve Miller Band. As a solo artist, his mellow soul broke through on the multiplatinum 1976 smash "Silk Degrees." But only now does the acclaimed vocalist feel he's really mastering his craft.

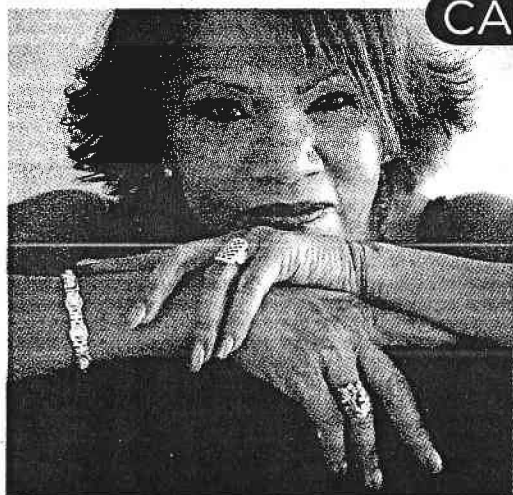
"Believe it or not, I do feel like I'm just starting to get the hang of singing," says Scaggs. "After doing the album of standards, I felt like I was just starting all over."

I've tried to use some of the things I've taken on in doing that music in everything I do. Learning to sing all over again, am I."

That album of standards, "But Beautiful" (\$18.98, Gray Cat records), was a revelation, with Scaggs lightly swinging classics like "What's New" and "Sophisticated Lady." It's success has him singing better than ever, as heard on the double-CD set "Greatest Hits Live" (\$18.98, Gray Cat) and the first U.S. release of the Japanese import "Fade Into Light." What they all have in common are classic songs — whether the standards of Duke Ellington or Scaggs' own hits from his four decades in the industry.

"If the songs have any merit at all, they can be revisited," says Scaggs, who promises another album of standards soon. "And personally, I like revisiting those songs."

## CANDI STATON



Don't try and tell Candi Staton what she can sing. The Alabama-born soul singer, who performs at the Bowery Ballroom on Wednesday, has been pushing boundaries her entire career. She began in the world of gospel by performing with the Jewell Gospel Trio, and then exited that for married life. Then she left her abusive marriage for the soul circuit, recording a series of classic singles for the Fame record label, including treasures like "I'd Rather Be an Old Man's Sweetheart (Than a Young Man's Fool)."

But her alcoholism found Staton hitting rock bottom, and she turned to the church in the '80s. Staton's been recording gospel music for the past 20 years and a new two-CD set, "The Ultimate Gospel Collection" (Shanachie), out Aug. 22, shows

her riling things up there as well. If Ray Charles brought gospel sound to the secular world, Staton brought funk music back to the church. And now she's delivered her first album of soul music in more than 20 years with the critically acclaimed "His Hands" (Astralwerks). Not everyone will approve.

"I have to do what I have to do," says Staton, 66, whose New York concert will be her first here in more than 20 years.

"When people say, 'I don't sing secular music,' I say right away, 'Do you sing 'Happy Birthday'? That's secular. 'Mary Had a Little Lamb'? That's secular, you know. You do sing secular music. Everybody sings secular music, and you live a secular life. You go to church maybe Tuesday and Wednesday night, Sunday morning and maybe Sunday night. But the rest of your time is spent at work. You spend it in your car, buying food,

going shopping.'"

Like Tina Turner's comeback album "Private Dancer," Staton's new album is crafted to reflect her life, including everything from a cover of Merle Haggard's "You Don't Have Far to Go" to the heart-breaking title tune "His Hands," where the hands switch from those of a lover to those of an abusive husband and ultimately those of God. It was written by British performer Will Oldham, aka Bonnie Prince Billy, specifically for Staton. There are some cheatin' songs from the old days she won't sing, but basically it's all sweet soul music to Staton.

"If someone out there doesn't agree with me, they just have a problem," says Staton. "For the rest of my days here on this earth, I'm going to do what makes me happy. As long as I know my conscience doesn't condemn me, then God said he is greater than my conscience. So I'm cool."

## JAMES HUNTER

You don't get anywhere by being shy. James Hunter was a struggling performer when a mate of his approached Van Morrison and talked up Hunter's talents. Remarkably, Morrison went to check Hunter out, and soon he was performing with Van the Man and John Lee Hooker in concerts around the world. But you can always ask for more.

"I was having breakfast in his hotel with Morrison," says the 43-year-old Hunter about the days just after he started touring with the singer. "He mentioned he was going to a tailor's to be kitted out with a tuxedo. Immediately, I piped up and said, 'Hey, how about getting us them as well?' He turned to his manager and said, 'What do you think about that?' So we all trooped off, and Morrison got us all kitted out like penguins. The five of us and Morrison were all giggling in this tailor's shop because it was a new experience for all of us."

Like the classic soul singers he admires, Hunter continues to dress natty for his gigs. His third album, "People Gonna Talk" (Rounder), is the first to be distributed in the U.S. Listen to his smooth singing on cuts like "Mollena" and "All Through Crystals" and you'd swear you were listening to some unpolished gem from the early Sixties. Surely no one writes songs this classic, this good, anymore?

Too have a girlfriend now; she hasn't upset me yet, laughs Hunter. "I'm not used to writing contented, happy songs. I'll either have to change me style or get her to provoke me."



## CORINNE BAILEY RAE



It should always be this easy: UK singer Corinne Bailey Rae worked on songs that attracted the attention of fellow artists and recorded her debut album with her own money. The buzz started to grow, and she performed on British TV last October before even a single song had been heard on the radio.

Critics paid attention, and an influential annual BBC poll of journalists named her the new artist they were most looking forward to hearing in the coming year.

"Since last November, everything has gone so steadily," says the 27-year-old Rae, chatting in an upper West Side hotel room after a day of press (and shopping at the Barneys New York Co-Op). "It's been weird and good — but quite spooky, like it's this path you're just walking down. That's been really amazing. As opposed to playing in a pub, carrying your amp down the stairs, getting the guitars on the bus, getting record companies to watch the band and they don't like this person or want that to change."

Hardly a surprise, since the CD is so engaging, ranging from the acoustic soul of "Like a Star" to more jazzy terrain, only to trump it all with a Stevie Wonder-like finale, "Season's Change."

Now Rae hopes to float to the top of the U.S. charts as well. She's performing at Webster Hall on Aug. 23, her latest return visit to Manhattan where an earlier gig had her delivering a wicked cover of Led Zeppelin just to keep fans on their toes. A full-page feature in *Billboard* described the biggest fear of her record company: that Rae may be becoming too successful too fast; they want her popularity to grow more gradually. No such luck. ♦