Late April brought two amazing triple-bills to Boston; the first, at Symphony Hall, featured three amazing soloists — Randy Newman, Martin Mull, and Sandy Denny. Mr. Newman was the headliner of the show, but as it turned out, his somewhat sloppy and dragging set proved to be anticlimactic after brilliant first and second acts.

Ms. Denny, a Britisher and ex-member of Fairport Convention and Fotheringay, opened with a beautiful, crystalline batch of songs; nerves and an alcoholic haze were beaten out by her superb voice and capable accompaniment. But it was local sensation Martin Mull (and his Fabulous Furniture) who highlighted the night. His mixture of clowning, music, and insanity was delightful; he will be playing this weekend at Sanders Theater, and he shouldn’t be missed.

These two artists are exceedingly brilliant and more than just competent; yet in Boston concerts recently, they have been prime providers of sheer boredom. Shawn Phillips, in a Sunday night half-capacity show at Symphony Hall, mixed a solo, acoustic set with a loud, hard-rock, band-backed one; the latter consists primarily of two rambling, interminable "songs" that would drive even the most open-minded listener to distraction. Mr. Phillips lacks perspective on his audience, and that fact tends to obscure his definite brilliance; he plays numbers and grinds them into the ears of the crowd until the irritation is of epic proportions.

In a similar manner, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, playing last Tuesday night at the Music Hall, imposed the same sort of uncomfortable dullness. Despite the presence of French violinist Jean-Luc Ponty, the allusions by Zappa to Boolean algebra and harmonic analysis, and Zappa’s innate humor, the audience was buried in somnolence; after an hour and a half it became unbearable.