Pablo Cruise and Armatrading excite audience

By Claudia Perry

Joan Armatrading, Pablo Cruise and Elliot Murphy played to a near sold-out crowd Saturday at the Orpheum in what might have been the best mixture of artists to grace the city for a long time. Both Armatrading and Pablo Cruise are enjoying a surge of popularity with the release of their third albums.

Elliot Murphy, the opening act, is the latest in a long line of Springsteen retreads. Affecting the New Jersey phenom's streetpost stance, he sang a few songs that were interspersed with comments about the lack of functional monitors and the lousy PA system. In most cases the comments were more interesting than the songs.

The sound system was revived in time for Pablo Cruise to take the stage. Swooning through an hour-long set, the group showed an exuberance that is not as noticeable in their recorded work. Lead singer/bassist Bud Cockrell said in an interview earlier Saturday that the group pushes to do their best in the studio. This could be one reason that their albums are technically proficient but rather distant. They are too busy working to loosen up.

The members of Pablo Cruise come from a number of diverse backgrounds. Guitarist David Jenkins worked with Ron Nagle, whose album, Bad Rice, can be found in culotte shorts all over the country. Nagle assisted with the ensemble's second album, Lifeline. Jenkins told The Tech that he was incredibly nervous about recording the group's first album. Their producer on that venture, Michael Jackson, is a man Jenkins respects, although he is no longer with them.

Cory Lerios, the pianist, writes most of the band's material. A former member of Stoneground, a group which enjoyed more popularity in England than in the States, Lerios is the most traveled member of the group. He has toured the US twice and England several times. Lerios is an excellent keyboard stylist. His solo during “Ocean Breeze” was one of the highlights of the evening.

Bassist Bud Cockrell is the most animated member of Pablo Cruise. He comes across as a small child let loose in a toy store. Cockrell seems to be genuinely glad to be onstage. His joy is conveyed through his music.

Joan Armatrading's part of the evening did little but confirm the existence of her prodigious talent. A first-rate singer and guitarist, she projects an incredible amount of stage presence. Unlike most female performers, Joan does not exploit her femininity by remaining ethereal and removed from the audience or by exaggerating and boasting like the worst male performers. Instead, she chooses to be herself; an appealing woman who has had rough spots in her life but has gotten over them.

The majority of Armatrading's performance consisted of cuts from her current release, entitled Joan Armatrading. She also played some material from her first two albums. On the first chorus of “People,” one of her more well-known songs, bassist Pat Donaldson sang the second chorus instead of the first. Joan stopped the band, motioned for them to begin again.

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Stephen Price's supportive drumming is incomparable. Joan Armatrading is finally getting the recognition she merits. Her first two albums probably offer a stronger body of work than her current release, which is good but not quite as tight as its predecessors. After Saturday's performance, both she and Pablo Cruise may have found their places in the sun.