

Caught in the Act

JOY LYNN WHITE

SUZI RAGSDALE

The Greys, Brighton

March 11, 2002



Joy Lynn White

I've had plenty of time, really, to recover from the shock and thrill of learning that we were about to hear one of the finest female country voices of its generation fill this tiny but atmospheric venue in the back streets of Brighton. Even so, when Joy Lynn White took the stage with her scorching version of Lucinda Williams' *I Just Wanted To See You So Bad*, the force from the blast was enough to make me reel a little. It's *such* a voice: a voice full of fragility, which its owner nevertheless wields with the fearless but practised abandon of a circus fire-eater. Later on, we were to hear it at its most smouldering when she gave us *Burning Memories*, the song that provided one of the finest moments of her early career.

And as if that weren't enough of a treat, Joy was sharing the bill on this tour with her friend Suzi Ragsdale. Suzi is a favourite at the Greys, and it was perhaps on her account that it was full to capacity. Crisp and melting like the deliciously bittersweet caramel on top of a crême brûlée, her voice had a touch of blues that made her a fine complement to her partner.

Their personalities were an amusing foil for each other, too: Suzi's witty but sweet and Joy's much more acerbic, her patter full of references to her career's failure – so far – to live up to her talent. A request for *Cold Day In July*, the song that she interpreted so powerfully on her first album, but that later became a more squeakily accessible hit for Dixie Chicks, was greeted with an abrupt rebuff: "I don't do that any more. Someone else does that now."

Playing piano and accordion, Suzi offered a set mostly of her own songs – perfectly crafted pieces, like the cleverly sustained imagery of *Ship In A Bottle* or the personal family story of *North Carolina*. There were also a few well chosen covers like Buddy Mondlock's *Heavy Coat*.

Joy presented a smattering of songs from her records, as well as a selection of newer ones she had co-written, which bode well for her forthcoming album on Hightone. They were both accompanied by the able but – understandably, considering the forceful company he was in – unobtrusive Claus Regli.

Whether performing alone or offering supportive harmonies to each other, these were performers of class. And though it was great to hear them in this intimate setting, I walked away regretting that we don't also see them on more glittering stages.

Janet Aspley