

## ENTERTAINMENT



AUGUSTO F. MENEZES/Staff photographer

■ The first half of Aretha Franklin's 90-minute show at the State Theatre Tuesday alternated between her 1960s-era smashes, such as "Chain of Fools" and "Think," and ballads such as "Skylark," on which Franklin delivered a scintillating jazzy vocal riff.

## Franklin still deserves 'Respect'

By **CHRIS JORDAN**  
STAFF WRITER

**D**uring her sold-out show at the State Theatre in New Brunswick Tuesday night, Aretha Franklin told a story about how she rehearsed Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark" for her debut performance on "The Ed Sullivan Show" in the 1960s.

Unfortunately for Franklin — and Sullivan's audience — her number was cut from the show.

"I went crying out of the back of the theater and got me a cheeseburger," Franklin said.

Perhaps it's telling that Franklin told the story, one of disappointment rather triumph. It's in the disappointments of life that the great artists draw the best stuff for their art.

Make no mistake, Franklin is one of the icons. Her impact on pop music — when you consider the vocal stylings of everyone from Mariah Carey to the American Idols — has perhaps been greater than Elvis and The Beatles combined.

Franklin, accompanied by her orchestra, came out Tuesday in a sparkly red dress with a red throw, and from the moment she sang the first note of her opener, "Respect," there was no doubt that she's the real thing. Franklin's voice has a fullness and richness no one can match, and a soulfulness, thanks to ascending trills and scatty improvs, that make her the Queen of Soul.

The first half of her 90-minute show alternated between her 1960s-era smashes, such as "Chain of Fools" and "Think," and ballads such as "Skylark," on which Franklin delivered a scintillating jazzy vocal riff.

After a 10-minute break, Franklin came back for the second half, which was a bit uneven. The set featured two Bobby Darin songs — "Beyond the Sea" and "Mack the Knife" — when one would have been just fine, and an overlong "Bridge Over Troubled Water," which turned into a gospel romp. Highlights were "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons," performed in tribute to Sam Cooke, and a poppy and fun version of her Stevie Wonder-penned classic, "Until You Come Back to Me."

Franklin doesn't perform much these days and scheduled shows are not guaranteed to happen. But judging from her enthusiasm at the State, it's a safe bet to say that Franklin has a lot of stage time left. A full-figured woman, Franklin never showed fatigue during the show, and even danced a bit toward the end. When Franklin sat down to play piano, she made sure to "pull in real tight because everything rolls out when you sit down."

The only time Franklin conceded the work she was putting in came when she said that after the show, "I'm going to get one of the good brothers to rub my feet."

That's the least that can be done for the Queen.

James Hunter, a likable Brit, opened the show. Hunter uniquely sings like Jackie Wilson and plays guitar like Scotty Moore. His sound is a rock-jazz-R&B-skiffle combo that has plenty of energy and jump.

Chris Jordan:  
(732) 565-7275;  
cjordan@thnt.com