

## **SXSW review: Duffy**

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*Austin-American Statesman*, March 15, 2008

Let's be candid and admit the British have had a few setbacks in the past 250 years — sorry about that revolution, guys, no hard feelings — but there are some areas in which they have always had it, as the kids say, goin' on.

We're talking, say, writers and playwrights and whiskey-makers and actors and spies and motorcars and queens and such.

And, oh yeah, they also have a gift for ginning out Anglo-Saxon and Celtic women who seem put on Earth to channel their inner Carla Thomas; Young lasses from the mists and the moors of the Auld Sod who sing like they came of age in Memphis and hung out at the Stax studio. You've got your Lulu, your Dusty Springfield, your Joss Stone, your Amy Winehouse and now a young 23-year old from Wales named Duffy.

Virtually unknown on this side of the Pond, she has held down the No. 1 spot on the U.K. charts for the past five weeks. Her performances at SXSW (she played a number of parties before her Stubb's gig) marked her first U.S. appearances "I've never played outdoors before," she marveled.

With her peaches-and-cream complexion and bouffant blonde hair, dressed to kill in the proverbial Little Black Dress and scarlet stilettos, Duffy was the visual antithesis of Winehouse. But comparisons don't really do justice to either singer.

Essaying a nine-song set of original material (she writes with a collaborator) Duffy cruised the streets of the soul and R&B 'hood. There was the velvet-glove Philly/Motown groove of "Delayed Devotion," the brooding, powerful, anthemic "Rockferry," the moody soul-noir of "Stepping Stone," some R-rated funk 'n' grind on a song whose title I didn't catch, and — last and far from least — the insanely catchy single "Mercy," with its ping-pong hook and impassioned, yearning vocal. It's a song that Martha Reeves or Aretha herself would have killed for, and Duffy acquitted herself in fine fashion.

As soul divas go, Duffy comes down stylistically on the cool and elegant Dionne Warwick side of the ledger. As good as her set was, if she could manage to add a little Etta James or Bettye LaVette sass and grit to her mix, there might be no stopping her.