TALENT IN ACTION
(Continued from preceding page)

ly become Shrikbecka's central visual figure—and a major part of its live appeal.

New songs like "Black Light Trap" and "The Reptiles And I" sounded markedly better in the live context, suggesting that the one area where the band excelled—its use of dynamism—has never been adequately captured on video. Shows like this can't help but win new converts.

DAVE DIMARTINO

JUDY RODMAN

Backboard, Atlanta

Tickets: $8

FROM A VISUAL STANDPOINT, country singer Judy Rodman does not fit the profile of a bonny-tongued brand. Her warm, responsible-on-stage demeanor lacks any grit. However, this is more than compensated for by the soulfulness in her voice.

At this recent show, Rodman's 75-minute headline set was delivered with both fun and precision. With only one album out, there wasn't a great catalog of original material to contend with. Consequently, she and her excellent four-piece band—featuring husband John Rodman—had to stoop to copy-group status via rather rote renditions of alien material, like "Ain't No Sunshine" and "Me And Bobby McGee."

When Rodman shone was on her original material. Both her signature No. 1 country hit, "Until I Met You," and her current chart-climber, "She Thinks She'll Marry," exhibited Rodman's strong, flexible vocal range.

The impression of a talented performer still somehow stuck with me. Perhaps her repertoire could be polished back Rodman's act from reaching major-concert-stand grade status. There's plenty of raw potential, but it will take several more original songs to bring Rodman up to that level.

RUSSELL SHAW

SUZANNE VEGA

The Bottom Line, New York

Tickets: $11

RUMOR HAS IT that the top brass at A&M is intent on making Suzanne Vega a star. Her early shows here Dec. 12 before a sold-out crowd—the first set of a three-night stand—showed some of the changes designed to move her in that direction. Happily, the main differences—a more forceful guitar player and keyboardist—have added vitality to her ethereal folk music, transforming some of the less fragile tunes into bona fide folk-rock.

Vega performed most of the songs from her 1985 debut album as well as a host of new and unreleased material. From the driving "Marlene On The Wall" to the a cappella "Tom's Restaurant" (tentatively scheduled to be the title track to her next album, due in April), each song was framed in a carefully crafted arrangement; seemingly every note had a purpose.

The only time the show faltered was when Vega put down her acoustic guitar for "Left Of Center," from the "Pretty In Pink" soundtrack. She seemed to be lost without something to hold on to and even looked a bit embarrassed when she found herself inductively moving to her own music.

All in all, however, it was an endearing, engaging performance of some of the freshest music being made today. If Vega continues to please crowds as she did this one—which gave her two encores and more than once broke into spontaneous applause during a song—A&M's goal for her might not be out of reach.

JEAN ROSENBLITH

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

China Club, New York, N.Y.

Tickets: $10

A LINE IN "Feel It Now," the first song offered at the Fountainhead's recent show here, makes reference to how the "beat goes on and on and on." And that is pretty much the nature of vocalist/guitarist Pat O'Donnell's and guitarist Steve Belton's live sound. The Irish duo—here with support musicians playing the additional instrumental parts from its debut China/Chrisyal album, "The Burning Touch"—established a relentless forward thrust on each song, most of which were extended to dance-floor length.

That the material never ran past the point of tedium was largely due to Belton's sometimes stinging, sometimes ringing U2 and Big Country-like guitarwork, which rode upon billowing and receding wave-like synth chordths. Thus, simple progressions and fundamental rhythm patterns could be repeated without sounding plodding.

Further breaking up the weighty bulk of the material was the brighter, more melodic "Sometimes," which featured Belton's percolating guitar undercurrent, and, uncharacteristi-

ively, a cover of the Hendrix version of "Hey Joe," in which he approximated the guitar part quite well, not quite pulling it off but not disregarding himself, either.

Meanwhile, sang with unassuming conviction, his eyes squinting while declaiming lyrics or shouting out the martial chord of the middle of set closer and first Irish hit "Rhythm Method."

JIM BESMAN

Talent Availability