

## SOULFUL PARKER

*Larry Widen*

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There was a time when Graham Parker was rock's most literate angry young man. Vitriolic lyrics from his first four albums were underscored by blistering riffs and scorching guitar solos from The Rumour, a backup band that any singer would kill to work with. But that's when Parker was in his mid-20's. Nowadays, often performing as a solo act, his approach is a bit softer, with the polished patina of a troubadour. Still, the grey-haired rock veteran didn't disappoint a roomful of loyal fans that showed up at Shank Hall on Sunday. With a shark-like smile, Parker introduced, "Obsessed With Aretha," a song from the 1996 album, "Acid Bubblegum," saying, "This next number will offend fat Christians, young female pop singers, journalists, and Aretha Franklin." He followed with "Soul Corruption," a reggae-infused scathing attack on American politicians.



But for every nod to his piss-and-vinegar songs, Parker served up some nice introspective pieces, including a new one called "The Other Side of the Reservoir." There he mourns the loss of a beautiful valley in upstate New York that was sacrificed to bring more water to the residents of New York City. Midway through his 90-minute set, Parker strapped on a honey-blond Telecaster to perform a few favorite rockers like "Discovering Japan," a down-and-dirty Fleetwood Mac 12-bar blues called "World Keep On Turning," and the crowd-pleasing "Hey Lord, Don't Ask Me Questions."

"I think I'm singing better now, in my 50's, than I did thirty years ago," Parker said in an interview before the Shank Hall performance. "When I was singing with The Rumour, everything was middle-range and loud. I've learned to bring out some different vocal qualities that allow me to be a better singer." This kinder, gentler Graham Parker is a far cry from the guy who, in 1986, came to town as the opening act for Eric Clapton's Summerfest show. During his set Parker blasted a fan for holding up a sign that said "E.C. is God." When reminded of the incident on Sunday, Parker burst out laughing. "I remember that guy! I really do," he said. "I told him I'd just seen Clapton backstage, and no way was he God!"