

JANE BOWN



Stevie Ray Vaughan: The blues singer who feels blue.

Plain song

■ Just as all actors who play villains are not evil, so not all blues singer are unhappy. So it was interesting to find a blues singer in London last week, who was feeling both black and blue. James Fox went to visit him:

'I'm grateful to be here,' said Stevie Ray Vaughan, wonder blues guitar player from Texas, to his fans who had packed the Hammersmith Palais on Thursday night. 'You don't know how grateful.' He looked as white as a sheet, a dreadful pallor on his almost Red Indian looks. He glanced at the side of the stage. He began to talk about Love. Even his mother, he said, had flown all the way from Texas to be here tonight. 'That's a love thing,' he said. He didn't tell his audience how, an hour or so before, he had risen miraculously, like Lazarus, from his bed in the London Clinic, where he had gone straight from his flight. When I talked to him in the dressing room, it was clear that this was where he would return. His British and Irish tour with his band, Double Trouble, was in some doubt. Stevie Ray had come to the end of his tether, after five years on the road.

He nevertheless played fluently and brilliantly, in his black fedora with its white feather plume and managed to sustain, for his encore, a large Indian head dress.

A Baptist boy from Austin, Stevie Ray had a particular pedigree apart from his fame as a session player for David Bowie and others. He was the last discovery, before recent retirement, of John Hammond, the patrician producer at CBS records whose other coups included Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen walked into his office with a guitar and a handful of songs. Hammond also hired Stevie at the first touch of a chord liking his purity, and produced his first record, 'Texas Flood.'

It was not easy to see Stevie Ray after the show. There was talk of double trouble. An aide told me he had fallen going off stage and hurt his leg. 'We're icing it down now.' But 'Mr Hammond,' as Stevie Ray referred to him with Presley-like Southern politeness, was the password. 'I've got stomach trouble and I'm exhausted. I've been on the road without stopping,' he said, patting his heart. 'I've got to look after myself now. I hope maybe I can go home and stay awhile with my mother.' Mrs Martha Vaughan, the only other person in the dressing room, nodded approvingly. The doctors still have to pronounce but with any luck he'll be back at the Hammersmith Palais on 16 October, then Newcastle, Manchester and Dublin.

Olympics there. A committee has been formed to lobby for another venue. It points out that the place already has a rather unwelcome claim to fame — its most famous former resident was Adolf Hitler.

The case is not that the locals should let bygones be bygones, but that they are alarmed by certain people who are cashing in on those bygone days. Olympic visitors will be greeted with a plethora of brochures and postcards portraying Hitler as a man who loved children and pets, a poor creature who loved not wisely, but too well.

I've been sent a couple of brochures all about Hitler. One is thoughtfully printed in Eng-

lish for the benefit of sports fans. Its glossy cover has a discreet gold sticker in one corner; peel that off and there's a sweet little swastika underneath. It contains a hundred or so pictures of things to do with Hitler, showing him patting kiddies, taking salutes, laughing with friends, playing with dogs, all the things your friendly neighbourhood dictator loved to do.

Miss chief

■ The first-ever all-woman battle for the Senate in America is being fought in Maryland, and, though feminists will not be pleased to hear this, it is becoming a startlingly bitchy affair.

The Republican candidate is Linda Chavez, a very beautiful, very right-wing wife and mother who used to work for President Reagan in the White House, and she makes the President look soft on everything, especially Communists.

The Democrat is a tough, very left-wing (in American terms) street politician called Barbara Mikulski. She is not married. Sexual innuendo is not allowed by convention in American elections as it isn't in Britain, but, just as in Britain, few politicians can bear to pass up the chance of working it in. Chavez accused Mikulski of having a 'San Francisco life style' and urged her to 'come out of the closet' to debate with her.

The lines, which are thought to have been drafted by Reagan's ultra hard-line communications director, Pat Buchanan, had a perfectly obvious meaning—so obvious indeed, that some newspapers refused to print them. It's thought Mrs Chavez might have

■ Much fun was had by the Tories when Denis Healey was forced to turn back at

done herself more harm than good.

San Francisco, a city where the great majority of the population is not gay, is feeling doubly peeved at the moment. The *Washington Post* reported a sniggering remark of President Reagan's about Colonel Qadhafi's love of colourful clothing. 'Why not invite Qadhafi to San Francisco, he likes to dress up so much,' the President said, at a private meeting to much sycophantic laughter. George Shultz added merrily 'Why don't we give him Aids?'

Angry citizens have demanded an explanation. Reagan limply said that he didn't want Qadhafi anywhere in the US and 'being Californian, that's the last place I'd send him.' This remark is absurd, since the inhabitants of Los Angeles and San Francisco have a traditional hatred: the southern city believes that the other is full of weirdos and gays, and San Francisco thinks that Los Angeles is full of weirdos and Mexicans.

Pic pick

■ Another Tory mailing shot is going out this week during the conference, but this time it has more style than Norman Tebbit's appeal to voters and more class than the cut-price offer of Jeffrey Archer's novels.

Central Office has realised that the party can boast four Prime Ministers who are still living — Mrs Thatcher, Edward Heath, Lord Home and Lord Stockton. It has commissioned 500 sets of caricatures of the four, and has persuaded the four to autograph each one. They will sell for £1,000 a set. There's going to be an official launch down in Bournemouth, but only Mrs Thatcher will be present.