

The Baker effect

Robert Yates at Wembley Arena

I WANT you to touch and cuddle the person next to you," instructs Anita Baker, warming up her audience. "You can even play kissy-face." Fortunately, the audience is mostly made up of couples, only too willing to answer Baker's love balladry with whispered sweet nothings of their own. To succumb to the Baker effect is to feel that glow often promised by advertisers — her voice, by turns tender and strong, reaching where other soul singers cannot.

She chooses to perform in the round, allowing her the

audience contact she obviously enjoys. (Stage right: "Are you two together? Why not?" Stage left: "Do you have any flowers for me? And a kiss too?"). Baker gives us between-song sermons on the subjects of the home and loved ones.

The set is dominated by songs from *Rapture*, the album which in 1986 eased the Baker passage into the pop mainstream. With her musicians — slick to a man — positioned to the sides of the platform, she alternates between playing solo performer and band leader. For the more mid-tempo (up-tempo is not in the Baker repertoire) numbers, she horses around with the guys, only to switch inward for *You Bring Me Joy*, or *No One*



Anita Baker: love balladry

In *The World*, the slower smoother ballads that serve as her signature.

Baker apologises for only offering a couple of new songs and wishes us a safe journey home, "Nice and warm and wrapped around each other". She would have been pleased to see the kissy-face antics on Wembley Way.

Robert Yates on Anita Baker

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