

House of blues

Amy Winehouse showed Dubai why the 'troubled' tag follows her so incessantly

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THE HUGE CROWD at Amy Winehouse's Festival City concert were firmly divided into two camps: the bemused and the booing.

The 27-year-old tottered onto the stage with her sizeable band in tow, looking healthy in a black floral cocktail dress. Sadly though, Friday night's proceedings tumbled swiftly downhill.

The starlet played a series of well-received gigs in Brazil last month, her first full shows since 2008, and headed to Dubai to close the 2011 Gulf Bike Week.

But she seemed utterly devoid of confidence - like a shy 14-year-old who had been pushed onstage and desperately wanted to leave it as soon as possible.

A far cry from the belting diva heard on disc, Winehouse was also bored-looking, barely audible and possibly intoxicated. By the time she had mumbled her way through third song *Tears Dry on their Own*, some sections of the audience were beginning to turn ugly.

Spirits were buoyed briefly with the opening chimes of *Back to Black* - though again the singer's awkward apathy gave it the magic of a mediocre X-Factor audition.

Sipping from a white mug, Winehouse frequently wandered away from the microphone mid-song and only acknowledged her Dubai fans as she decided to leave the stage for a 15-minute break.

Her excellent crew of supporting musicians picked up the slack though, as backing singer Ade Omotayo entertained fans with a few soul numbers performed with pinpoint precision.

Even he seemed confused though, looking

expectantly to the wings after two songs and quickly twiggling Winehouse wasn't returning just yet. Not that it mattered - as Omotayo drew a huge cheer for his efforts from the otherwise bored spectators.

When she did re-emerge, Winehouse gave an unintelligible rendition of *Rehab*. "How you feeling Dubai? All right?" she asked, only to be met with a combination of boos and tense quietness. "That's what I thought," the singer replied, folding her arms with resignation.

Again the goodwill was reserved for her backing band, as backing singer Heshima Thompson grabbed the spotlight for a brief interlude.

Valerie was Winehouse's most successful track of the night, as the Londoner seemed at ease with one of her biggest hits. The same can't be said for encore numbers *Love is a Losing Game* and *Me and Mr. Jones*, which proved the night's final lead balloons.

Amy Winehouse is one of this generation's most gifted musicians, though sadly she's also one of the most frustrating - and punters' post-show anger was understandable, given that tickets set them back upwards of Dh300.

"My expectations were high for the show because of Amy's reputation as a singer," said Laura Hamilton-Gould, an entertainment booker from England. "Unfortunately she didn't deliver. Everyone in the crowd wanted to be there and she didn't. There was a real buzz, but that was gone after a couple of songs."

But chastising Winehouse any more in these pages feels a bit like yelling at a lost kitten. More than anything, it's sad witnessing someone unravel so publicly and with such abandon.



Geek chic

N*E*R*D's performance for Gulf Bike Week was anything but weedy

WHILE THEY DREW a fraction of Amy Winehouse's audience, US hip-hop act N*E*R*D gave a souped-up show on Thursday night.

Supported by R&B singer Mike Posner (top left), who later joined the band onstage, the group began with *I Wanna Jam* from their 2010 album *Nothing*.

Frontman Pharrell Williams (top right) explained that it was the group's first time in the Middle East, adding, "Girls behave yourselves...we don't want to get in trouble", which became something of a mantra for the cautious pop star.

The 37-year-old enjoyed a strong rapport with the enthusiastic crowd, which consisted largely of the city's young and trendy.

After *Sacred Temple*, Williams launched into *Backseat Love*. "How many girls like love?" asked the rapper. Quite a few, it turns out.

The ladies man added that he had spoken to fellow performers who had visited Dubai previously, such as Akon and Will (no, we're not sure which one either), and praised the energy of its people.

He also dedicated a track to the turbulent areas of the Middle East, and their inhabitants who are longing for peace.

Though a regular on 'best dressed' lists, Williams opted for a simple style on the night - sporting a white T-shirt, grey hoodie, jeans and turquoise Nike trainers. In line with his repeated promise to "keep it clean", The Virginia native gave expletive-ridden hit *Drop It Like It's Hot* a family friendly makeover.

For their finale, Williams and fellow rapper Shay Haley beckoned the audience to squat to the ground, before pogo-ing in unison for a wild finale. Mike Posner was particularly excitable, bouncing around the stage and grinning like a maniac (no wonder girls think they're cooler than him).

And despite their lack of an encore, fans were universal in their praise for N*E*R*D's short but sweet set.

"I thought it was pretty sick," said Quincy Izibili, an 18-year-old student from Nigeria. "There was a lot of crowd interaction and Pharrell had it going on."

"Top notch all round," added Zaqi Ismail, an aspiring actor from London. "The whole show was electric."

