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Staff photo/ROBERT DUYOS

David Bowie chose not to play the handsome human jukebox on Tuesday night at the Chili Pepper in Fort Lauderdale, where he plays again tonight.

NO MERE EARTHLING

David Bowie shows he continues to grow and adapt — and can rock.

By SEAN PICCOLI
Music Writer

A performer with more facets than the proverbial *Diamond Dog*, enduring British rocker David Bowie could, at this late period in his career, fashion himself a comfortable image as grand marshal of his own hit parade.

But on Tuesday night at the Chili Pepper in Fort Lauderdale, where Bowie played the first of two-sold out shows, the man who has blown through a musical wardrobe full of masks and second skins chose not to play the handsome human jukebox, stocked only with his best-selling stuff.

Bowie, 50, strove instead to be the performer who still grows and adapts, still sheds skins without recycling them whole. In this he succeeded, mixing early material selectively, and surprisingly, with just a few big hits and a wealth of songs from his excellent new album, *Earthling*.

Perhaps Bowie is saving his back catalogue for posterity, or the bond market, which he entered this year in a novel scheme to reap investment cash from his royalties.

In any case, it was Bowie the rocker, not the banker, who thrilled a sellout crowd of 1,500, which saw and heard the best of Bowie's *Earthling* band: guitarist Reeves Gabrels, keyboardist Mike Garson, drummer Zachary Alford and bassist Gail Ann Dorsey.

Bowie walked onstage alone at 9:15 p.m., in a simple white shirt and slacks and holding an acoustic guitar. He opened the two-hour, 23-song set with *Quicksand*, an unplugged ode to end-of-empire malaise in his native England that could just as easily have been a song for today's America. In his trembling dramatist's baritone, he offered himself as "proof of Churchill's lies," while lamenting, "I ain't got the power anymore."

The band slowly filed in behind him, and it took the song to a grand, sorrowful close.

Bowie, looking eternally young in a vampirish sort of way, followed up with two more back-of-the-rack gems, *Always Crashing in the Same Car* and *Waiting for the Man*. Next came *The Jean Genie*, done up like Muddy Waters' blues-stomping *Mannish Boy*, before it segued into his more fa-

IF YOU GO

David Bowie is booked for a sold-out show tonight at the Chili Pepper, 109 SW Second Ave., Fort Lauderdale; 954-525-0094. Doors open at 8 p.m.; the concert starts at 9.

mitiar jump and jive.

Bowie was all rock on *Panic in Detroit*, one of the evening's standout numbers. He strutted through the majestic metal-electronica of *I'm Afraid of Americans*, the densely poetic *Seven Years in Tibet* and the airy, winsome *Battle for Britain*, all from *Earthling*.

Gabrels' guitar crowded the airwaves like a ghost in the machine, howling and squalling tunelessly around Bowie's voice and the huge, rolling soundscapes that rippled off the stage. On *Stay*, Gabrels mated heavy-'70s crunch with arcing, upper-register wails, while Bowie flew below the storm with a wry, hollowed-out voice.

For all his forward-looking effort, Bowie made room for reverie, but even then reworking familiar songs to suit the astral-cabaret persona that colors his current clubs-only tour. *Fashion* had a riveting punch not heard on the old album version.

It was accompanied by something resembling visual torture: a speed reel of triptych imagery flashing on the screen behind the band. A single, giant prop eyeball anchored the screen — indeed, looked pressed against it, as if Bowie were paying homage to the deprogramming sequence in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*.

Under Pressure, Bowie's old duet with Queen, found new piquancy in its meditation on "the terror of not knowing what this life is about," given the death of Queen's front man, Freddie Mercury, and everybody's creeping sense of a world out of control. Dorsey, the bassist, sang excellent duet on *Under Pressure*, as well as an encore version of Laurie Anderson's pulsing, avant-garde classic, *O Superman*.

Bowie finished the show with a spirited, moving sing-along of *All the Young Dudes*, a song made famous by Ian Hunter's band, Mott the Hoople.

"I wrote this one for me," Bowie said, "but now I guess it's your song, really."