

Cher's pop corn



Picture: DANNY ELWES

Cher in one of her incarnations last night: "Wearing Tina Turner-esque red hair"

PICTURE that over-sized meat abattoir, Wembley Arena. People are eating toffee popcorn instead of doing drugs.

White jean-beclad thirtysomethings are sipping beer out of plastic bottles. And nobody is smoking in the no smoking auditorium.

The only sniff of something really *way out* here are the neon exit signs.

This is the first night of sex queen Cher's two-night stand in Wembley.

Cher has 15 gold albums, has had 46 top-100 hits, and has received an Academy Award for her performance in *Moonstruck*.

She also has a tattoo on her left buttock and the sort of figure that could sell a Volvo to a rock star.

The arena is filled with around 8,000 fans. Tame heavy metal guys with long hair and Cher clones on their arms. And corporate businessmen.

Waiting for the woman who became a household name a quarter of a century ago and hasn't been with a man of her own age or older for almost as long.

The half Armenian and Cherokee Indian, born Cheryl Sarkisian, who has recreated herself so many times.

As the star comes in at 9.10, the crowd in the centre of the amphitheatre stands up with screams and claps. Wearing Tina Turner-esque red hair, black thigh-length jacket and black drainpipes, she belts out: "I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

The woman who sometimes bares her bottom in fishnet stands in an enchanted gothic forest with a wind machine blowing her wig.

"I'm glad to be back. Who'd have thought I'd have been back and grown lovely red hair?" says the 46-year-old who has had surgery on her nose and breasts and looks younger every year.

The under-dressed rock siren with the wig stylist reappears for the next item in high black-leather boots, a cobweb body — another minimal creation of costumer Bob Mackie — and black leather jacket to match her now black hair.

Now it's 9.40 and she's in sprayed-on lace hot pants and bodice.

A handful of people are standing, wagging their

Sex queen hits middle of the road

by Caroline Phillips

bodies and clapping. One Cher clone in a stars and stripes shirt dances, as if to a mirror. Cher and cher alike.

She goes for a break. Downstairs "official franchise vendors" sell £22 Love Hurts (the name of her current album) tracksuit pants and £4 Cher (in lace cami-sole) posters.

Upstairs the audience is treated to her more celluloid version. Tearful extracts from *Mask*, then the *Witches of Eastwick*.

Now she's in *Moonstruck*, and a yelp goes up. She

reappears in front of her screen persona in white Snow Queen outfit.

Her mostly white audience tap their feet. Minutes later she's in a harem outfit. The crowd behave like nuns in a brothel.

Madonna or Prince would create an atmosphere. But Cher singing this sort of motorway music to middle-of-the-road types doesn't even get a traffic jam.

Her fans stand up towards the end. They even clap, the closest she gets to audience participation, when she sings: "If I could turn back time". There are cries, whistles and screams of encore.

But you can count the people who are really jiving on one hand. And they all look like Cher.