

Singer's folk music conveys local, world political struggles

By DEBBIE ABE

Folk singer Susan Arrow is ready and willing to aid the causes of oppressed people by sharing with them her energy and music.

An average practice session finds Arrow preparing a gig for a political group or cause. She has recently sung for a Trojan Decommissioning Alliance demonstration, the International Women's Day program at the Atrium and a support group for the striking miners. She is currently preparing several numbers for Solidarity Day for South Africans.

Arrow feels that folk music is a very powerful way of communicating, particularly when it concerns a people's struggle.

"Folk music is the way people convey their struggle," she says. "Song was the way the Vietnamese kept their spirits up through all of the bombing. The Irish have had many songs about their struggle against the English."

"When I sang at the coal miners' support group, they (the members) kept saying that throughout the history of the union struggle in the coal fields, there have been songs

about their struggle and conditions in the mines. They've used song as a means of communication and solidarity."

Because Arrow feels she has access to many obscure songs, a good memory and a large repertoire, she feels committed to share her music because "it's important that we know how others have dealt with oppression."

Currently a Lane Community College electronics and music student, Arrow has played six- and 12-string guitar for 14 years and recently has learned to play the laud, a Portuguese mandolin-like instrument. She has a strong and clear voice which landed the folk singer her first major professional job at the famous Troubadour club in London.

Arrow comments, "They hired me because it was a very, very noisy place and I could be heard over the talking. I belted out every song and really whopped on the guitar." Arrow became the resident folk singer at the club and played there once a week for a year.

A researcher and student of folk music as well as a performer, Arrow spends much time searching for new mater-

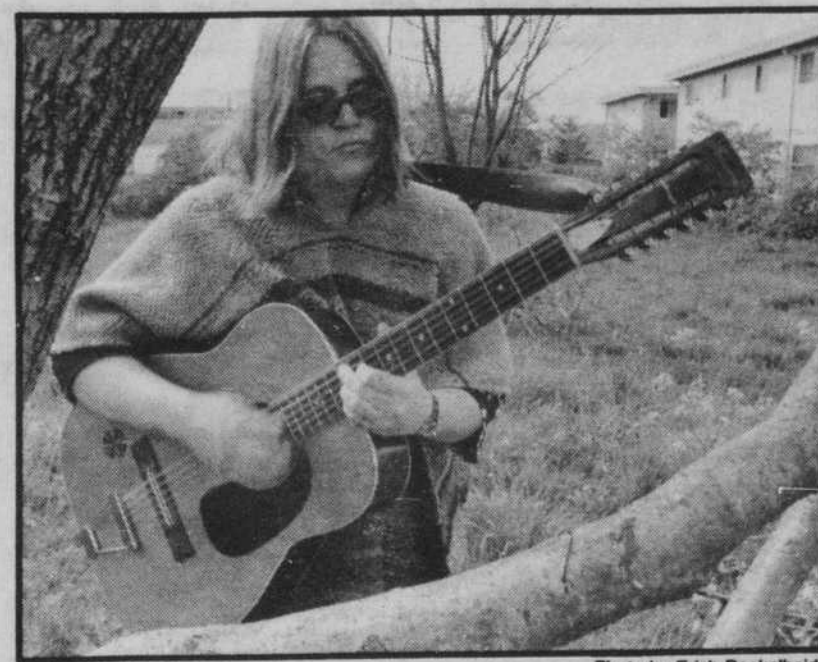
ial. She especially likes "turn-around songs" that involve a surprising and different perspective of the relationships between men and women. A diligent searcher of such folk songs, Arrow once did a project examining that type of song, but found that they are few in number.

One she did locate is entitled "Little Phoebe." The folk song involves a farmer and his wife trading jobs for a week, and the farmer learning how much harder his wife has to work than he.

Arrow became curious about the turn-around folk songs as a result of her feminist interests. Considering herself, above all her many other interests, a feminist and musician, Arrow has gradually become interested in women's lives and particularly in how folk songs reflect their lives.

She draws heavily on the material of Frankie Armstrong, an English feminist, and Ruthie Gorton, a socialist and feminist from Los Angeles.

Because much of the music she performs is unpublished, Arrow must search for a recording or performer of a song she wishes to learn, tape record it,



Susan Arrow

Photo by Erich Boekelheide

listen to it a few times and learn the melody and words by ear. She usually works out her own accompaniment and many times prefers to sing a cappella (without accompaniment). "I'm finding that when I sing a cappella, people in restaurants tend to listen more because obviously the words are important if there's no accompaniment," she says.

Arrow adapts her sets according to what type of event or audience she performs for. For instance, she is currently learning songs about South Africa by Ruthie Gorton for the South

Africa Solidarity Day. If she plays at a restaurant such as the Homefried Truckstop, she throws in songs with which the audience will be familiar; for example, a song by the Beatles or Joni Mitchell.

Arrow plays regularly in the Eugene area at various functions and at restaurants such as Homefried Truckstop, Honey's Cafe and Gertrudes. She will perform on April 15 at the University of Oregon as part of the Women's Symposium. Watch for her name in the newspaper for other dates and places.

Eugene Opera pleases despite obstacles

Eugene Opera's production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is full of happy surprises despite formidable difficulties of staging and singing.

The play is an unusual combination of comic and serious elements, recounting the last days of Don Juan, the legendary Spanish lover. It begins when he murders the Commandatore, who has apprehended the disguised Don ab-

ducting his daughter Donna Anna. There follow various comic and serious scenes in which Don Giovanni tries to disrupt the incipient wedding of two peasants, Masetto and Zerlina, by charming Zerlina into his bed. Numerous times one of his jilted lovers, Donna Elvira, interrupts his seduction. She warns him that his loose living will lead to his ruin.

Throughout the opera Donna

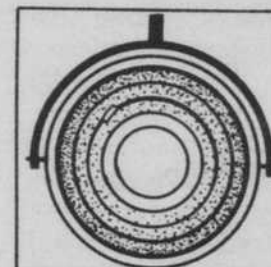
Anna and her betrother, Don Ottavio, search for her father's murderer. Even though they discover that Don Juan/Giovanni did it, the final act of vengeance emerges unexpectedly from the world beyond the grave: a statue of the Commandatore is animated by his ghost, which compels the murderer and profligate to enter the jaws of Hell. The remaining characters sing the moral of the opera, as if it weren't obvious enough already.

Although the production as a whole is uneven, there are many fine moments. Neil Wilson (Don Giovanni) and Elwy Jones (Leporello) work well together, providing the funniest moments in the opera. Wilson sings superbly; Jones, although he doesn't have a typically "operatic" voice, sings convincingly and with great assurance. Guy Aydelott (Don Ottavio) has made impressive improvements as an actor since last

year's *Carmen*; his singing is excellent.

Susan St. John (Donna Anna) and Virginia Hurwitz (Zerlina) are also fine singers. Hurwitz seems

hardt are a felicitous combination. The uncut version of *Don Giovanni* — which they have chosen to present — is long and potentially boring to all but



By RAY FREEDMAN

Don Giovanni

more at ease in her role as the coquettish peasant girl; St. John has a more difficult task in portraying a dutiful daughter seeking her father's murderer, and is less at ease on stage.

Patricia Eysenbach (Donna Elvira) is stronger dramatically than musically. This is unfortunate since her role is as musically important as it is dramatically crucial. Kevin Boling (the Commandatore) is passable but generally weak. Larry Evans (Masetto) is a fine baritone and an outrageous mugger in his role as a peasant buffoon.

Musical director Philip Bayles and dramatic director Betty Bern-

aficionados. Bayles and Bernhardt have paced the music and action so well that the length is never apparent, and the comic business is done so well that one is never bored.

The orchestra plays quite well; the woodwinds deserve special praise. The multilevel set is a good idea that seems incompletely realized. The lighting is generally ineffectual, except in the final scene, which is appropriately stunning. The costumes range from competent to excellent.

Despite technical and musical unevenness, Eugene Opera's *Don Giovanni* is definitely worth your time and money.



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