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Ani DiFranco gives 'brilliant' show

By Khaiersta Flowers
for the Emerald

The Righteous Babe Records symbol glowed in the background while the stage was cleared for the arrival of Ani DiFranco. Cartoon music and echoing screams filled the air as the concert hall was drenched in darkness. DiFranco appeared with her back to the crowd.

DiFranco exuded powerful charisma — and she knew it. "We are a polished, precise folk music force," she said.

That charisma radiated from the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall stage Monday night during the last stop on her nationwide tour. The concert was sponsored by the University's Cultural Forum.

"It's like the music pours from her soul," said audience member Lila Stratford.

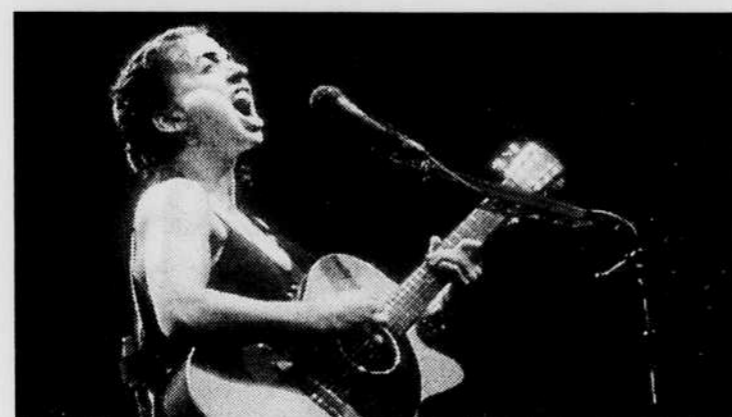
DiFranco appeared on stage with an eclectic band, part of her ever-evolving musical style. With instruments ranging from drums to the cello to a funky accordion, the sounds were as complex as DiFranco herself.

"She is a songwriter, a producer and a singer, but her personality comes out more than anything," said concert-goer Liz Anderson. "She has a very intimate connection with her audience."

Since the debut of DiFranco's label Righteous Babe Records in 1990, she has produced 11 albums. She gleaned most of her concert selections from her newest album, "Little Plastic Castle," and her 1995 release "Not a Pretty Girl." Her energetic concert flavor took a spin from the harsh, bitter lyrics of her 1996 album "Dilate."

From the quiet melody of "Not a Pretty Girl" to the random beat of "Fuel," her concert music carried a compelling social message. Addressing topics such as bisexuality, racial tolerance and self-discovery, the folkstress turned her music into a political art form.

Her most powerful selection condemned racial intolerance: "They caught the last poor man / On a poor man's vacation / And drove his black ass down to the



Singer Ani DiFranco energetically performs for a Hult Center audience Monday night.

station / We might as well turn off the sun / We'll never live long enough to undo / Everything they've done to you."

As DiFranco continued to build up steam, her band played "Little Plastic Castle," prompting several women to show their independence by dancing topless in the front row.

The lights dimmed and the stage fell to darkness as DiFranco energetically wrapped up the

last half of the concert. The crowd responded with an earthquake of stomping feet, violent screams and rhythmic clapping.

DiFranco reciprocated with two encores, one of which included fiery accordion playing.

"I do it for the joy," DiFranco said of her enthusiasm for the night's performance.

One thing is certain: the joy could be felt at this brilliant performance.

Casey Neill hopes to woo Eugene

By Michael Burnham
Oregon Daily Emerald

Singer/songwriter Casey Neill said he does not believe his three-headed brand of Celtic-folk-punk music will ever earn mass commercial and public appeal. But don't tell his fans that.

One night, his trio was wooing baby boomers at a packed coffee house.

The next night he was thrilling thirtysomethings at a Celtic music festival.

A third night he was rocking Generation Xers at an Earth Day concert.

But whether Neill is just modest or turning a blind eye to success, one thing is certain: his sound sells.

The Applesseed recording artist will try to sell his trio's unique Celtic sound to the Eugene crowd tonight at a performance at Sam Bond's Garage. The concert comes to town as the 27-year-old musician promotes his self-titled album, released in April.

The ten-track compact disc includes Celtic/folk tunes of such polar variety that it is hard to find any one song on the album that captures the feeling of the whole. But one certainty about Neill on his new release is his storytelling — be it an

American tale or an Irish narrative. He injects a social message into traditional Celtic folk rhythms. Celtic music combines ballads with hard-thumping drums and acoustic string and wind instruments.

"It really felt like a songwriter's album, and it felt really personal," Neill said. "But I'm not writing only within the genre. They're contemporary songs."

Neill said the contemporary feel is a combination of the trio's musical staple — traditional Irish music — with bluegrass, folk and a pinch of punk. Neill grouped his trio's playing with a wave of Canadians and Americans who perform music with Irish overtones.

"Young people are playing Irish music that is not a museum piece," he said. "You want to maintain tradition but keep it alive. It's a balance."

Nary a tune on this album be-

longs in a museum. The album's first track jumps off a springboard of hard-picking acoustic guitar and conga drums in the narrative song "Double Dutch." But Neill's trio excels most in its performances of ballads.

The song "Another Point of View" has an intimate, campfire quality that is backed by Anna Schaad on viola and violin and Hans Araki on flute and whistle.

A fine aspect of this album is Neill's tasteful infusion of historical, literary and artistic references into his songs. The album's seventh track, "Whole Cloth," was inspired by Alice Walker's collection of essays, "Living by the Wind." The Celtic influence in Neill's music shines through the most in the album's ninth track, "Breathe Life." The song — a social message about post-industrial Midwest America — weaves Neill's heavy-handed acoustic guitar with trio-member Zak Borden's octave mandolin. This song, which can be compared with material from the Irish folk combo The Chieftains, is sure to induce plenty of foot-tapping and dancing with a live audience.

The trio's performance at Sam Bond's Garage begins at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$5 at the door.

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Amy Boytz covers entertainment for the Emerald. She can be reached via e-mail at amyboytz@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

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