

Ani returns to Eugene, her 'little plastic castle'

The iconic songwriter's Eugene concert included songs both new and classic

By Aaron Shakra
Pulse Editor

Ani DiFranco must have a special affinity for Eugene. Consider this: She has toured around the world for more than a decade straight, yet both of her live albums — 1997's "Living in Clip," and 2002's "So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter" — include songs performed in the Emerald City.

CONCERT REVIEW

Eugene, in turn, was positively effusive in welcoming the little folk singer — for those who could get in, anyway. Crowds awaiting admission into the McDonald Theatre spiraled around the block, where a temporary subculture had spawned. Two women sang their home-brewed songs of dissent, petition signature gatherers preyed on potential voters like ravens and just about everyone who wasn't in line to get in was looking for a ticket because the show had long since sold out.

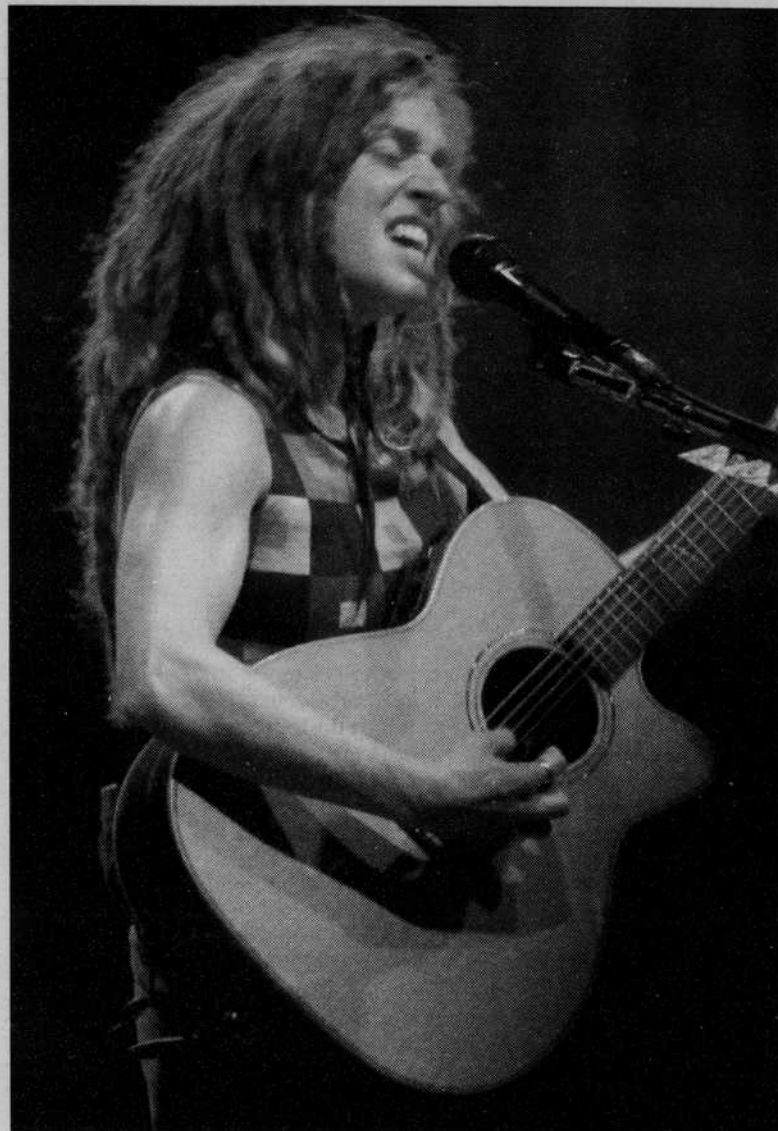
The evening began with a performance from New York-based guitarist/songwriter Tony Scherr. Scherr, who gushed over Eugene's clothing venues, played a jazzy set of music to a boisterous, conversational crowd. These voices were a distraction from anyone trying to listen, but it's hard to blame them — bodies were tightly packed from the front of the theater to the back, making the energy in the theater nearly palpable.

Toward the end of Scherr's songs, applause grew louder, but whether it was in anticipation of DiFranco's arrival or for Scherr's music is a matter of interpretation.

When DiFranco finally did arrive, the crowd noise became nearly deafening. While she frequently self-identifies herself as the "little folk singer," it doesn't really do justice to the response her music provokes in listeners. Let's just say it isn't little.

While she has been performing solo for the past few years, this time around DiFranco was joined by double bassist Todd Sickafoose, who added a punch to her songs without losing the intimacy of a solo performance. The duo quickly established a musical dialogue that set the tone for the night, with Sickafoose's percussive pounding and sparse playing complementing DiFranco's guitar attacks.

The opening number was the enduring tune, "Shy," with lyrics like, "Oh sleep is like a fever / and I'm glad when it ends / and the road flows like a river / and pulls me around every bend."



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Folk singer/songwriter Ani DiFranco played songs mostly from her two most recent studio albums during her performance at McDonald Theatre on Tuesday night.

A large bulk of the material DiFranco played was from her two most recent studio albums. However, there was a good mixture of tunes played, including her poem-like "Coming Up" — in which DiFranco flowed her words over a guitar progression of harmonics. This was easily one highlight of the night.

Like all her shows, she played plenty of new songs as well: "Nothing Much to Say," "Manhole" and "Knuckle Down," where she sings: "Cause I think I'm done comin' to get closer to some imagined bliss / I gotta knuckle down, just be OK with this / I gotta knuckle down just be OK with this / 'course that star-struck girl is really someone I miss"

About halfway through her set, she had planned to play a song with her four-string baritone guitar, when someone shouted from the crowd "Little Plastic Castle," at which point she said "I've never done this before," and returned to play the song. Clearly, she hadn't played it for a while — she repeated one set of lyrics twice. But perhaps this is appropriate for a song that has the lyrics, "They say goldfish

have no memory / I guess their lives are much like mine / the little plastic castle / is a surprise every time."

The show ended appropriately with "Evolve," the title track of her previous album, and a quick encore of "Gravel."

Contact the Pulse editor at aaronshakra@dailymerald.com.

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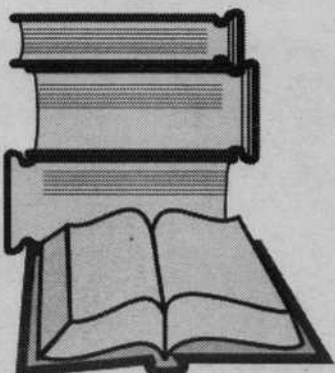
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