

MUSIC

A girl on a road

Ferron's never-ending journey includes a stop in Portland this month

BY KIM STEPHENSON



Ferron plays the St. Johns Pub on May 5

In anticipation of my phone date with Ferron, I listened to her CD *Driver*. I hadn't done so for a few years, and I quickly remembered why.

I cannot play Ferron and still function. I find myself being pushed, without my particular consent, deeply into the couch. And there I sit, listening intently for the duration.

When my favorite song, "Girl on a Road," played, I did what I always do: cried for 30 minutes. I stopped the CD so I could squeeze every last drop of grief out of me.

I can't get the lyrics out of my head, so I ask Ferron about the song. As it turns out, that track represents her new direction and work. She is polishing an autobiography titled *Up* and a one-woman play excerpted from the book called *What to Do While Making Bread*. She hopes Portlanders will find both works passing through by next spring.

"I was sort of amazed when I wrote 'Girl on a Road.' The whole thing with the family was just one line, and now I have a whole play coming out about it," she explains. The show is about her own childhood, "which was not very pleasant."

Ferron shifted toward other kinds of writing after a painful break with Warner Bros. Records in late 1996. She stayed at the Institute for Musical Arts in Bodega, Calif., to heal

and gain support and ended up becoming its Writer in Residence.

"I never managed to get another CD out after the Warner Bros. thing; it took the wind out of me," she sighs. "By the time it was over, I was broke, and I basically traded my product." The singer sold the rights to *Driver*, *Phantom Center* and *Still Riot*, "and so I had no product and no agent for a while."

After years and years on the road, a quarter of a century," Ferron states, "I started noticing that women had a political voice but not a personal voice, still. After... Warner Bros. fell apart, I was in a quandary. So I stayed down at [the institute].... They had to encourage the hell out of me to get started, but once I got started I was really moved by that kind of intimate work—working with 10 or 12 women. I felt, and it still feels, pretty important and what I enjoy doing—seeing any kind of writing come out."

Since 1997 Ferron has been urging writing out of women with two workshops she designed with her partner of three years, Marie Papacostaki, who is also a writer and a teacher. "Opening to the Muse," a weeklong structured class, includes exercise assignments and a 24-hour day of silence. "Wet Ink," a less formal workshop, includes meeting for morning meditation, working all day, eating dinner together,

then sharing the day's accomplishments.

"We are trying to see what blocks us from expressing ourselves," Ferron explains, "so we have opened it up to women who write poems or stories or songs or who want to do watercolor or take photographs. It's really about what happens between you and you to get your stuff together and done."

Both summer workshops are at the couple's home in Satuma Island, British Columbia, "where there are more sheep than people," she notes. Ferron grew up in and outside of Vancouver, British Columbia, and says the 300 residents of the island have known her since she was a kid.

This spring the singer is beginning work on the property to better accommodate the six to 12 workshop participants.

And in between, she still plays her music and imparts her wisdom to diehard fans. She says it has taken her a long time just to feel alive and whole within herself, to not be striving for anything but her own definition of personal excellence.

"I feel I am running on some kind of inner truth that doesn't require me to be different from anybody else," she says. "It takes a long time, you know. When you are younger you find that your sense of excellence was not yours at all but somebody else's you adopted. I just get closer and closer to what matters to me." □

FERRON plays 8 p.m. May 5 at the St. Johns Pub, 8203 N. Ivanhoe St. Portland dyke musician Lynn Frances Anderson opens. Tickets are \$18 from Ticketmaster. Visit Ferron at www.ferronweb.com. To learn more about her workshops, e-mail salonlaubergine@aol.com.

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