

The Arts

Ferron Captivates Audience

by Birdie MacLennan

After a half decade's hiatus, Canadian singer-songwriter Ferron is back.

Sporting a new haircut, an elegant gray suit coat, a moody guitar (was it the weather or the sound system?), and her recently acquired "resident alien" status, Ferron captivated a packed audience at Montpelier City Hall for a two hour solo performance on the evening of November 18.

Over the years, Ferron has become known as a troubadour, poet, visionary, and guiding light in many a heart. Her albums, *Testimony* and *Shadows On a Dime* (released in 1980 and 1984 respectively) and subsequent concert tours propelled her to the forefront of the women's music scene. She sings from the heart, taking the bitter and the sweet of life's experiences, of love's losses, and crafts the ordinary into the profound. As one reviewer put it, her lyrics are "intense, psychological, and compelling."

Even so, Ferron's affable stage presence and upbeat countenance offset the weighty ambiance of her lyrics. In Montpelier, her songs were interspersed with chatty, light-hearted dialogue as she told stories, asked questions, and solicited responses.

The audience, a hefty percentage of them spirited lesbians, joined in for some playful banter and lively accompaniments on many old favorites. Indeed, Montpelier was bestowed with the honor of giving the best-ever audience rendition of clapping to the tune, "Rosalee."

Although much of the performance consisted of older material, many of the songs seemed to take on new meaning with the passage of time. "Ain't Life a Brook" was prefaced with, "I've been on every side of this song since I wrote it, and now when I sing it I don't know whether to be guilty or pissed off."

Alluding to events in Tianamen Square and the current political climate in the Middle East, it was noted that there appears to be a continuing appropriateness to the lyrics of "It Won't Take Long:"

"And beware you sagging diplomats for you will not hear one gun/And though our homes be torn and ransacked we will not be undone/For as we let ourselves be bought, we're gonna let ourselves be free/And if you think we stand alone, look again and you will see ..."

While there's more to many of these older tunes that could be written or philoso-

phized about, there's newer tunes to chew our cuds on. From her recently released album, *Phantom Center* (on Chameleon Records and now available at most record stores), Ferron presented us more of the stuff that many of us have been waiting for. There was the philosophical, "Higher Wisdom," and the harmonious (with help from an exquisite audience chorus) "Inside Track" and "Harmless Love." Also new from this recording were "Sunken City" and "Heart of Destruction," which, although lyrically powerful in and of themselves, were presented with piped-in music intended to replicate the "cooler and bigger" sounds of the musicians' accompaniments on the album.

It was awkward to try to get into these tunes without seeing a band behind her ... though we did get a sense of the techno-direction her sound is taking these days. In another place and time, one might catch Ferron live with her band, as she announced that she is touring with them to some venues. However, two encores amidst the standing ovations that ended this concert would seem to indicate that Ferron's grace, charm, poetic and visionary eloquence stand quite well on their own.

On a closing note, credit and applause must be given to Brattleboro's Queen's Run Concerts for sponsoring Ferron (along with Holly Near, Tret Fure, and Cris Williamson) as part of the November Women's Music Series. They've been doing a great job of bringing performances to us throughout the state. And word has it that we can look forward to more great shows that they will be sponsoring in the months ahead. Watch for Casselberry- DuPree in February, and Melanie Monsour in the spring!

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