

# Ferron: Lyrics that don't miss a beat

by Connie Clarke

This was Ferron's first trip to Halifax, and even the weather tried to make her feel welcome.

It poured both days, reminding her of home in Vancouver, though she's been living in the desert, in Sante Fe, New Mexico, since 1987.

It may come as a surprise to some that Ferron is not musically trained and doesn't know some of the chords she plays on her guitar. "I'm hearing something and I feel it. When I was younger when I first started making music I would hold the body of the guitar... very close to my chest where the solar plexis is and I would play a few chords and they would like vibrate or move wave-like through my body. That was how I made a lot of decisions about how a song was going to sound, was how it felt."

So why a poet-singer-songwriter? Why not something else? "I eventually realized I had to write songs and sing because I lived in a world that I didn't trust or didn't understand the motive."

Ferron began writing songs when she was 11, but performing for others came 12 years later, almost by accident. A friend submitted a home tape of Ferron's music to some people organizing a benefit for Press Gang Publishers in Vancouver. Ferron ended up performing for the first time in front of five hundred people, and "surprise of my life, they liked it".

Contributions by friends and some additional fundraising enabled Ferron to put out her first, self-titled album in 1977 on her own label, Lucy Records.



Photo: Eric Boutilier-Brown

Ferron plays Flamingo

This was followed in 1978 by *Ferron Backed Up*, in which she played with a small band. Both albums sold out quickly and are

now collectors' items.

In 1978, Ferron also teamed up with her manager, Gayle Scott, and together they raised the funds and produced *Testimony* in a

proper studio in 1980. *Shadows On a Dime* appeared in 1984 and was co-produced by Ferron, Scott, and jazz rock singer Terry Garthwaite. Both of these albums have received critical praise.

You have to pay attention to her lyrics. Unlike most of today's performers who take a verse or two or maybe the whole song to get their point across, every word matters in a Ferron song. "Oh, I admit that I hold the words — I hold them tight". Miss a line and you've missed a lot.

"I want the people to feel the courage to feel proud of themselves, to feel expansive, to feel power, to feel sadness in public and in private and the way to get those things is through the mystery and the magic of music, that's my way."

Humanness and freedom figure prominently in Ferron's work. "I started to get a sense that my truest, deepest feelings, the reason of my life, was being thwarted, was being taken away from me and given back to me in a box and didn't want the feeling cause I'd already had it and why was it taken away and then given back to me in a different form?" Because Ferron isn't musically trained, she has a different approach when it comes to com-

posing with other musicians. "We talk about my feelings or the feelings that I hope to create or take care of". For example, in "Snowin' in Brooklyn", Ferron wanted the feeling of a first snow fall. She feels it's demanding for others to work this way "but it does the trick." The musicians worked hard and experimented to get just the effect she wanted, settling on a Rhodes synthesizer.

Kevin Zernio accompanies Ferron on piano this tour. They rehearsed, relying on emotion and interpretation until Kevin learned the show without resorting to written music.

Ferron says she's not about success or real estate. "I like that I can sleep at night. Every single night". So what is Ferron about, what is she after? "I'm not a real partyish type person on the stage but there is this sense of celebration that I'm looking for, a spiritual celebration, an acclamation of self that I'm looking for and that I want to do in front of people. And I want them to bear witness to it in me and I want to bear witness in them and somehow I think that will keep up close."

Ferron performed February 23rd and 24th at the Pub Flamingo. Additional research for the article was by Steven Slater.

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