

Guthrie charms ArtsCenter crowd

"Ya know, this is a very weird night — it could go either way."
He grinned from behind his curly, shoulder-length gray-blond hair and laughed his unique nervous laugh. The sold-out crowd at the ArtsCenter Thursday night agreed — and they laughed and joked and occasionally sang along with him.

Arlo Guthrie likes to tell stories. Funny, irreverent and, yes, often truly stupid stories. He also likes to play the guitar and experiment with the buttons on his piano-keyboard. Guthrie kicked off his "20th Anniversary of 'Alice's Restaurant' Tour," by entertaining his audience for two hours with his unique blend of music and humor.

He began with his six-string guitar and opened the show with "Pretty Boy Floyd," a tune written by his father, the legendary Woody Guthrie. In the first set he also played the blues classic, "Key to the Highway" and Elizabeth Cotton's "Freight Train." These songs still fit after 40 years, that's the sad thing," Guthrie said, "but they say this stuff so eloquently."
He then sat down at the keyboard and shared the story of how he found

Cathy McHugh Concert

out he's not just any nostalgic folksinger anymore. "Someone in the basement of a New York department store came up with this high-pitched *ding* sound — they figured out it makes people buy stuff. I was in an elevator in a huge mall in Canada and I noticed they were playing *whole* songs with this one sound. Then, I heard this: — he played the first three bars of "Alice's Restaurant" — "and I suddenly realized I was somebody. Consciousness in shopping."

Shaking his head, he looked around at the still laughing crowd and shrugged, "I know it's stupid, but that's why I'm here."

Then he kicked into his hilariously irreverent, "Oh Mom" "you're just a throwback to the '60s generation", which more than a few audience members chimed in on. When the applause died down, Guthrie had another story to tell. "Sometimes I could see great songs go by me and I'd be looking for a pen or a piece of paper and just lose it. I'd think, man, whoever gets that, it'll be a good song." Chuckling, he added, "A guy named Dylan got most of them!"

Guthrie ended the first set with the childlike tune, "Garden Song," "inch by inch, row by row, gonna make this garden grow", but he didn't make

it through without yet another story. "You know, kids really like this song. Oh, I don't mean to be stopping in the middle of the song or anything, but they love it. They want to hear it again and again. So, of course, you want to find out why, so you can write a lot of them."

After a half-hour intermission Guthrie came back looking possibly even more mischievous. "I went to school one time — about the same time as Mr. Quayle. People were either in school then or visiting Asian nations. I like to be around smart people, which is why I'm here tonight."

Then he opened the set with with a rocking "Motorcycle Song," "I don't want a pickle, I just want to ride on my motorcycle." "Truly a brilliant piece of work here, I know — this song is stupid. I love America."

Switching to his 12-string he played the drug-induced "Coming Into Los Angeles," which he played at Woodstock. "Don't touch my bags, if you please, Mr. Customs man" — maybe this song doesn't apply so much to the '80s, but I think the instinct to escape is always entirely correct."

He followed that with an eerily Dylan-like rendition of "Tambourine Man."

Next he headed back to the piano. He proceeded to launch into the humorous "Phone Song," but once again, stopped in the middle of a verse: "This is Bob Dylan's favorite song of mine — he called to tell me."

Next, Guthrie performed what is

probably his biggest hit, "City of New Orleans."

Then it was back to the six-string for "This Land is Your Land," complete with the verses that were censored out of children's schoolbooks.

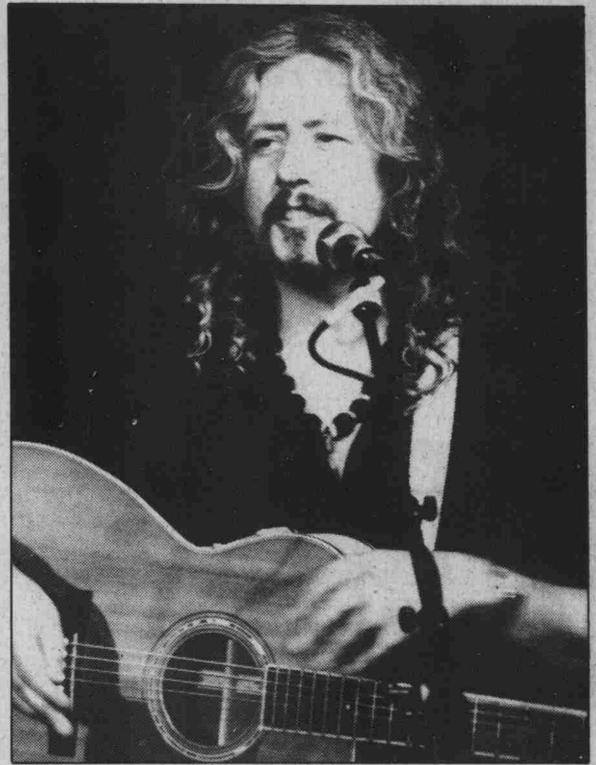
For his final song, Guthrie proved his versatility by playing both the harmonica and the keyboard for an incredibly moving rendition of "Amazing Grace." Guthrie does this song at every concert, and he explained why.

"John Newman, the author of this song, was the captain of a slave ship. He was headed to America aboard a ship with thousands of people chained to each other when he decided it was the wrong thing to be doing and he turned around. Anybody not afraid to turn around and do something right is a friend of mine."

A standing ovation prompted Guthrie to return for his encore amid the inevitable cries for "Alice's Restaurant," which he didn't play. "Imagine singing about the same half-hour of your life every night? Not me."

Instead he sang two shorter and gentler tunes including a tender rendition of Elvis Presley's "Falling in Love with You."

It was a weird night. But if you missed it, don't worry, because he'll be back March 24 and 25 to close the tour at the ArtsCenter. Maybe then that song about Alice will come around on the guitar one more time.



DTH/Tony Mansfield

Arlo Guthrie performs at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro Thursday

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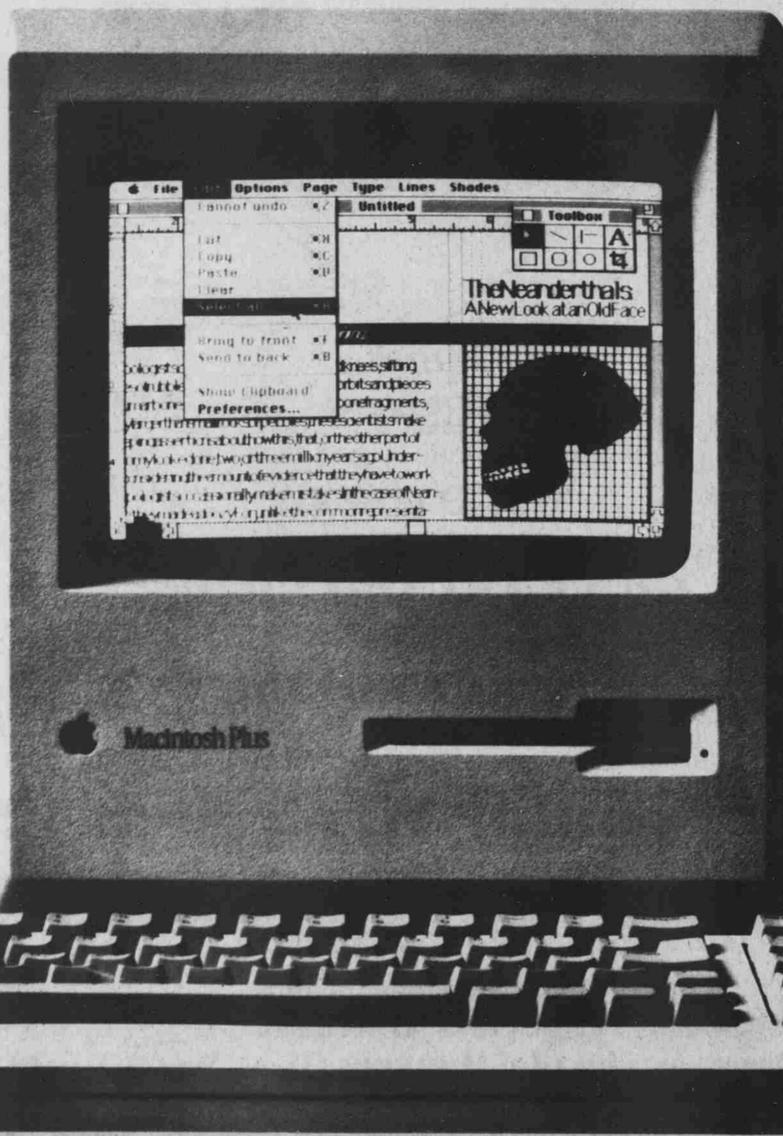
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