

PHRANC 'N' STEIN

Fans of poised cool will go bananas for the cover of the new PHRANC LP.

Our heroine poses in Technicolor with a glass of milk, the very picture of convention and surely your ideal Jewish lesbian political folksinger to date. The LP is called 'I Enjoy Being A Girl', and of course contains the Rogers & Hammerstein tune of the same name.

"It's a very consciousness-raising song for me," says Phranc over Coca-Cola as she relaxes backstage in the Digbeth Irish Centre.

"When I was growing up I really hated being a girl 'cos you had to wear dresses and things, but now I can *truly* enjoy being a girl, I can dress how I like and have the haircut I want."

Phranc's career has been a splendid one. In 1986 she released 'Folksinger', a debut LP containing attacks on female mudwrestling and people who park in spaces reserved for the disabled, and the glorious 'One Of The Girls', the only moving song ever written about a swimming team. 'Folksinger' was the work of someone who can be both serious and hilarious, but always stirring.

Now she returns with a similarly dazzling LP, courtesy of Island Records.

The first song on 'I Enjoy Being A Girl', a tune with the confusing name of 'Folksinger' is more than a molecule critical of certain singers with acoustic guitars and turtle-neck sweaters who have cleaned up in the three years since Phranc single-handedly revived folk (well, she did).

'Folksinger', so far as millions are concerned, is a dead good rude song about Michelle Shocked. Phranc says yes and no.

"It's just about everyone who's jumped on this bandwagon, it's not about one specific person. Everyone thinks, oh, black turtle-neck, it's Michelle Shocked – but they *all* wear



Phranc: girls will be girls

black turtle-necks!"

Phranc screams, then sighs. "It's about all of them. And me too . . . About ten years ago I wanted a folk revival so bad . . . so I've been waiting and waiting for this folk thing to happen and I didn't have a record out and it was, oh my God, here it is . . . I have a lot of respect for Michelle and for Tracy, I think they're really good singer-songwriters . . ."

Damn. But Phranc is being rude again, a bit.

"But after waiting for so long I couldn't resist writing this silly song . . ."

She looks totally serious. "But if you don't sing about certain things, if you look a certain way, don't mention the 'L' word, don't mention sexuality, and sing beautiful songs like Suzanne Vega about princes and pretty kings, it's a lot easier to get a record out."

The records that Phranc brings out are about her own kind of reality. There's the incredibly beautiful 'Miriam And Esther', a

tribute to Phranc's grandmothers.

There's angry political stuff about South Africa and the jerk-off punks who wear swastikas. And there's her interest in news items. 'The Ballad Of Lucy And Ted' is very Phranc, the story of two polar bears in the Brooklyn Zoo who, woken by kids swimming in their pool late one night, did the sensible thing and ate one of them. The police over-reacted spectacularly and the story hit the news.

"If you had a colour TV, all you saw was a wall of blood. They had slaughtered those bears – 20 shots. What was the point? It just really set me off," Phranc mutters. "Like, animals have no rights, *obviously* it was the bears' fault."

Phranc adds, unnecessarily, "I very much write from an emotional place" and elaborates.

"Some songs are written out of anger, some are written out of joy and nostalgia. Like the one

about my bird Weegee, 'Rodeo Parakeet', that's a true story. He was a remarkable bird, he flew into my life when I needed him most. He escaped from somebody's cage and he chose me, he just got on my shoulder and gave me a kiss."

It's all true, readers. However, let us move on to the most joyful tune on the record, 'Toytime' – a tribute to the home of children's pleasure, Toys 'R' Us.

"The first time you go to Toys 'R' Us is really something, isn't it? I get this rush when I go, it's just like an incredible drug.

"I collect Action Men and GI Joes at home, and toy kitchen appliances. I really, really like all the fake food. They have fake plastic bread and sandwich meat and cheeses and they all look really real."

Fake food and real music – a slogan for the '90s. Phranc is the GI Joe of popular music and her plastic foes will fall screaming into the mud.

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