

Arts & Entertainment

'Suzanne Vega' has rare, 'slick edginess'

By Chris McCubbin
Staff Reporter

Singer/Songwriter Suzanne Vega sounds tired. That's not surprising since she's in the last couple of weeks of her first grueling national tour.

But she's charming on the phone. Unlike many performers, she's as lucid and articulate in conversation as she is on vinyl. But talking to some faceless kid from Nebraska who can't think of anything to ask that she hasn't already heard a zillion times since her first record came out last April, she sometimes can't help but let the fatigue show.

Vega, 25, is a New York City native and graduate of Barnard College with a degree in English. She also was a dance student, a swimmer and quite possibly is the best thing to happen to folk music in five — maybe 10 — years.

Her album, "Suzanne Vega" cracked the top 100 this summer and is still on the charts. The video for the single "Marlene On The Wall" was in light rotation on MTV for seven weeks. She was dressed up like Marlene Dietrich and acted sexy. She said it was fun.

Newspaper and magazine articles about Vega have one thing in common: Driven by the music critic's mysterious need to categorize everything, the writers always include a mini-catalog of musical influences. Vega never gives the same list twice. Today she's admitting to Simon and Garfunkel, Laura

Nyro and Lou Reed, who's always on her list.

Vega doesn't always sing her songs, sometimes she talks them. "Cracking" has been called "The first folk-rap fusion song." Rap is not a conscious influence, she said, but growing up in Harlem and Spanish Harlem rap was always there.

Old movies pop up in several of Vega's songs. She said she didn't watch much TV as a child and it was a big thrill when she finally discovered the movies of the '30s. She said she loves the ones where the woman plays a classic character.

Vega said New York City is an important influence. She said it gave her her dry, unsentimental sense of humor.

You also never run out of things to write about — "it's right in front of you."

"Suzanne Vega" was co-produced by Lenny Kaye, the former lead guitarist for Patti Smith and patron saint of New York punk, and Vega's long-time friend Steve Addabbo.

Kaye just happened to be moving toward an acoustic sound as she was moving towards a more electric sound, she said. They seem to have met in the middle.

Kaye and Addabbo gave "Suzanne Vega" a slick edginess that's rare in folk music.

Vega started writing songs at 14 and performing at 16. She first played New York's Folk City club at 20 and stayed there five years.

She said college was hectic, and included two jobs, not counting gigging at Folk City and the swim team. She had to take an extra year. She said she always wanted to be a singer, but her parents wanted her to have an education, and she enjoyed school.

Vega's songs can grow from an idea, a line, a chord, a mood or a title, she said. She used to write them in an hour or even a half hour. Lately they have been taking as much as a day.

"Undertow" is her most controversial song. One writer said it was about ravenous sexuality. It's not, she said. She said she was wondering what the undertow would say if it had a voice. Every person has a little undertow in him, she said.

"The Queen and the Soldier" is Vega's most political song, she said. It's also more of a story than her other poems. It's a very cinematic song, she said. When she was writing the song it was like she was right there: Watching the idealistic soldier confront the young queen. She said if she was less realistic she would almost call it a vision.

Vega is going to finish her tour, take a break, and then start work on her next album. She said she's going to stay with her semi-electric (she herself only plays acoustic guitar) band on the next album and she said the next album will be less subdued. It might have some dance songs.

Vega, who has never been to Nebraska, said she'd like to visit — maybe on the next tour.



Courtesy of A&M Records

Vega

Cheesy gift tasty, helps NU dairy program

By Chris Welsch
Senior Editor

There are few things in this world more disgusting than pre-Christmas hype. Especially if it comes before Dec. 24.

I cringe when I hear Christmas Musak downtown or in the malls; I turn my head to avoid seeing the lights and plastic Christmas trees; I shred the Christmas advertising inserts in the papers.

There ought to be laws against such crass commercialization of Jesus Christ's birthday.

Dining Review

But when my editor offered me \$12 and a free box of cheese if I'd review a Christmas present idea, I threw my ideal to the wind. Money is money and cheese is cheese.

The university's department of food science and technology has some cheese and sausage gift boxes for sale. The cheese is made in the food pilot plant; students learn by helping make the stuff. The sausage is made in the department of animal science, also in conjunction with research and teaching programs.

The prices are reasonable, the packages attractive, and the product is

delicious.

I tried the two-pound gift box with summer sausage, Husker mild cheddar and sharp cheddar cheeses. It cost \$7.99, \$9.99 if delivered by United Parcel Service.

The cheeses come in an attractive box, embossed with the university seal and lined with plastic Easter grass, which adds a festive feel to any gift. A friend and I ate most of the cheese at one sitting over a six-pack of Shaeffers, the white wine of beers. I recommend real white wine to complement this cheese — or maybe even a fruity bottle of California Nouveau Beaujolais.

No, I don't hate California, but I do hate wine-cooler commercials. The white wine of beers is better than wine coolers, especially with this cheese.

A trend quickly became apparent. The beer and Husker cheese disappeared first. Husker cheese has a distinctive, mellow flavor and sensuous consistency that made it our favorite. The other cheeses were good, but not extraordinary. The sausage was spicy — maybe a little too spicy — but it went well with the cheeses.

After the last saltine and cheese hors d'oeuvre slid down my gullet, I felt much less like a sellout. Surely J. C. would understand the need for nourishment on a cold November night, and this also helps a good and needful cause: The poor U of N, when I thought

about it, it reminded me of the story of the poor little match girl, freezing to death in the cold. I only hope frail NU has a similarly painless death. By buying this cheese, you help the university, and if you think of NU as a poor, shivering match girl, it'll make you feel benevolent, too.

The prices on the gift boxes range from \$4.99 for a 1-pound box to \$21 for the 6-pound Smoke Haus Box. The boxes can be gift-wrapped for an extra buck. You can buy them at the university Dairy Store at 38th and Holdrege streets on East Campus. You should probably call and order ahead, although a few

boxes were on hand Friday when I picked up mine. The cheese hotline number is 472-2828. Orders will not be taken after Dec. 22.

Now I'm full of good cheese and holiday cheer. I'll be more tolerant for pre-Christmas mumbo-jumbo. Ho, ho, ho. I'm off to use my pay for presents.

'Ninth Configuration' unusual; 'Bitten' 'surprisingly unbad'

By Tom Mockler
Staff Reporter

"The Ninth Configuration," now showing at the Plaza 4, is one of those films that appears without a warning, departs in a similar fashion and makes you ask: "What's going on?" I may be confused, but I swore at the end of the film it had originally been released in 1979. So what is it doing here now?

Movie Review

Well, perhaps it is partially because of the emergence of main character Stacey Keach as a semi-star. It also provides an interesting parallel/contrast with "Rambo."

"The Ninth Configuration" is the brainchild of William Peter Blatty. He wrote, produced and directed it. I really know nothing about him, but it is interesting how his style mirrors the Vietnam pictures of the late '70s, although this film was probably too intense for mass appeal.

The film ranges from metaphysics to an orgy of violence, so it is somewhat difficult to pin down without explaining too much.

Like many such films it begins in a loony bin. I would say "psychiatric asylum," but that would not be quite accurate.

During the later part of the Vietnam War, the narrator tells us, there

was a dramatic rise in psychotic behavior on the part of servicemen. It was not known whether the psychosis was true "combat fatigue" or faked.

A number of centers were set up around the country to examine such patients to answer this question. Center No. 18, a German castle transplanted to the Pacific Northwest, is the setting for this story. Its work is more experimental than others.

Enter Col. Cane (Keach) who, we assume, has just been assigned as the new director. His behavior is just plain strange. In some ways stranger than his patients. The twist, as we find out later, is that he is a patient.

Much of the story revolves around Cane and Lt. Cutshaw (Scott Wilson). What makes Wilson so interesting is his uncanny resemblance to "Easy Rider" star Dennis Hopper. I would almost swear he was his younger brother. The resemblance is not merely physical, but in their simultaneous neurotic and spacey mannerisms, speech patterns and characters.

In any case, there is a lot of talk about God and human goodness and the lack thereof. Cane is the proponent and Cutshaw the devil's advocate. It's really heavy, man.

Blatty is basically suggesting the odds of life on this planet are so low that it becomes easier to believe in a God than pursue a scientific explanation. Although some ele-

ments in this story line are a little hokey, the film holds up pretty well. I recommend it.

"Once Bitten: a Tasty Comedy" falls into that gray zone of formulaic comedy that is neither good nor bad. It simply exists.

This film revolves around a vampiress (Lauren Hutton) in search of virgin blood to preserve her youth. The catch: She must find it by midnight Oct. 31. By this, we can see that the release of the film was ill-timed. It should have been released at Halloween.

The story is basically "The Hunger" meets teen-age sex comedy. An earnest youth frustrated by his "good" girlfriend goes to a singles bar in Hollywood with his friends and, well, meets Hutton.

Actually, the film is surprisingly unbad. Jim Carrey, the earnest youth, is pretty good in both comic and straight scenes, although this film is unlikely to catapult him into the Brat Pack. Hutton is sufficiently sultry as the vampire.

A pleasant surprise is Karen Kopuns, the suffering girlfriend who, instead of playing the sweet-but-dull type, is really pretty sexy in her own right. She is clearly a match for Hutton.

The teen-age sex comedy aspects are refreshingly ungross. Still, the film never really aspires to be any more than a factory-produced studio comedy. I'd pay \$1.50 to see this film, currently showing at the State Theater.

Springsteen and Wham! take top video awards

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Bruce Springsteen's blue collar pathos and the pretty-boy teen appeal of the British band Wham! won top trophies during this year's second American Video Awards ceremonies.

The hour-long show broadcast Friday was the second American Video Awards trophy handout in 1985. The 3rd annual show was in April.

The National Academy of Video Arts said a contract with ABC forced it to change the show date. The academy's awards compete with the MTV video awards, held this year in a lavish and well-tended affair at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

Springsteen won two awards, one for best male performer and the other for best pop video of his song "Glory Days."

Best performance by a duo or group went to Wham! for "Everything She Wants," and the group took a second award in the best home video category for a production titled "The Video."

Comedian and rocker Eddie Murphy won the best urban contemporary video category with his "Party All the Time" video with singer Rick James.

The best female performance went to Aimee Mann of the Boston quartet, 'til Tuesday, for "Voices Carry."

Ricky Skaggs won the best country music video award for "Country Boy" and Sade won in the category of best new artist.