

A storyteller with a song

There isn't really a message in my songs, but there is something to give people to think about. I write about things that are interesting to people and most of my songs are about priorities.

—Milo Binder



By Yvonne Salce

Milo Binder once played the role of a college student from Texas A&M, during his acting days in Los Angeles. Now a singer/songwriter, Binder visited College Station for the first time Sunday night.

"I used to be an actor, before I decided to starve even more and started doing this," says the 26-year-old folk singer, during an hour-long performance at the Front Porch Cafe.

Capturing the small audience's attention not only with his timely sense of humor, but also with his clear, straight-forward voice, Binder weaves together rich and narrative tales about broken relationships, unemployment, greed and aging.

Jokingly, he refers to the relationship songs as "a journey into the dark recesses of my mind." And although the topics of his songs may sound depressing, he lightens them up with humor.

In the song "That's What You Get For Loving Me," Binder ignites laughter from the audience with lyrics like, "I learned all the songs, you used to hate . . . and sang them."

But even though many of his songs are funny, they do not lack meaning. His song "Coffee Shop

Women" explains how we often ignore the people around us and forget they are real people, too. And "Donald Thorn," the story of a man who missed his day at being born and suggests: "If we don't watch it, our lives can be as flat, meaningless and absurd as that of poor, unborn Donald."

Needless to say, the L.A. native received an encore. Immediately Binder took the stage, but not before sharing with the audience his philosophy behind encores. "The trick to encores is getting on before they stop clapping."

In an interview following the show, Binder expressed how being comical can often jeopardize being taken seriously.

"For a long time, my shows were considered comedy-type of acts," says Binder. "So I am constantly worried about people taking me seriously."

But it's Binder's strong song-writing and humorous remarks between songs that won him the audience Sunday night, as well as a pretty good place in the acoustic-music scene in L.A.

He released his first album on Alias Records in November, and is

taking time off from his bus-driving job at UCLA to let people know the album is out there. His self-titled debut is a collection of many years of hitting the L.A. pavement in order to make a name for himself. Oddly enough, Milo Binder really isn't Milo Binder. At the encouragement of his manager, he changed his name at age 16.

"I wanted a name that sounded kind and friendly," says Binder, which incidentally rhymes with "kinder."

Looking back, Binder regrets changing his name. He has a strong dislike for gimmicks and musicians who feel a need to change themselves for the sake of a sale.

Once a follower of the cool-guy kind of haircut, leather jacket and earring, Binder now prefers a comfortable pair of tennis shoes, blue jeans and a San Francisco baseball hat.

"I think it takes a lot of guts to get out there and be your own person," he says.

It also takes a lot of guts to get out there and perform, but that never seems to bother Binder. He says he never gets nervous, except in shows where the audience is hanging on

his every word — which was the case Sunday night.

Suspended by his every word, the audience absorbed his story-telling songs with all their unexpected twists and turns, which he sung with an easy-going attitude. He wasn't there to pound his profound knowledge or die-hard opinion into the audience. Rather, he preferred to raise questions in their minds, letting them draw their own conclusions.

"There isn't really a message in my songs, but there is something to give people to think about.

"I write about things that are interesting to people and most of my songs are about priorities."

Priorities are important to Binder, more so than success. He's not obsessive about ambition. After this two-month tour, he would like to go back to having a normal life, as opposed to living on the road and out of a van.

"Someday . . . I'd like to get to the point where my name is on the ticket and people have come to see me."

In the meantime, Binder won't have any problem developing his own following. His honest and refreshing approach will carry him to success — whether he likes it or not.