



ROBIN FLOWER; NANCY VOGL AND BARBARA HIGBEE, left to right, performed Sunday at Mount Holyoke College.

Robin Flower and friends make happy and serious footstomping music

By BARBARA STACK

SOUTH HADLEY — Robin Flower, Nancy Vogl, and Barbara Higbee brought their footstomping California country music to Mount Holyoke College Sunday night and set their fans to singing and dancing in the aisles. The trio (a gaggle of gals, they called themselves) moved their broad instrumental and vocal talents through a range of traditional and contemporary folk styles.

"Old-time music is what feminism is about. It has to do with struggle and sharing, with everyone getting a turn." Robin Flower is the musical and dynamic pivot of the group. (Her new solo record, "More

Than Friends," is available locally.) She took her first turn of the evening on fiddle, rolled her eyes to the right and drew fiddler Barbara Higbee into some memorable doubling. Their sensuous bowing in traditional and jazz-influenced harmonies gave life to such Appalachian and Irish tunes as "Ragtime Annie" and "Drowsy Maggie."

Tight, expressive three-part harmonies and the fine country style vocals of guitarist Nancy Vogl united the trio in a moving performance of Jean Ritchie's strip-mining song, "Black Waters." On bass, and especially on guitar Nancy Vogl picked the clean and solid lines which have become her trademark.

Robin Flower took out her old Gibson A mandolin to play an original instrumental composition, "Sometimes Coffee Tastes Like Chocolate." Almost without melody, the tune featured rapid and playful ex-

changes between fiddle and mandolin in a style reminiscent of the popular "dawg music" of David Grisman.

But above all, it was as a flat-picker that Robin Flower shone. Whether strutting her stuff on the hollow body electric, or on bluegrass style acoustic guitar, her sometimes driving, sometimes twinkling, always tasty leads wove the group together and engaged the audience in a delightful recognition of feminist music as interplay.

Yet these musicians also came to the Valley with a serious purpose. They sang of our debt to "Mother Earth." The Aunt Molly Jackson song, "I am A Union Woman," spoke of the struggles of women workers in Harlan County and elsewhere. A particularly spirited performance of the Bonnie Lockhart tune, "We Ain't Satisfied" left us with a clear charge of work to do. Whistling.