

POSITIVE ABOUT HER MAKE BELIEVE

JODI DUCKETT, *The Morning Call* May 29, 1993

Sometimes Linda Arnold's life seems a little unreal, but it's nothing like the world of make believe that she creates with her music.

In that world, there's a jester named Shenanigans and a dinosaur named Tyrone. There's a cow that crows and a lizard that's a wizard.

Arnold, who headlines Mayfair's Family Event today, creates a fantasy world that drives the imagination and enchants even the most action-driven of little tykes. Her performances are a bit like musical theater for children, often including characters and elaborate props. But the quality and message of the song are top priorities.

"I try to create a musical environment that promotes self-esteem and positive, loving values," said Arnold, who is signed to A&M; Records. "It (my music) tries to engage children's imagination. It's nurturing. It celebrates the innocences and the wonder of childhood."

Arnold was once a contemporary folk singer with a political agenda, singing about the need for nuclear disarmament and universal love at peace rallies throughout the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas in the 1970s. She also wrote songs about death and dying and about pregnancy, sometimes interspersing the two.

She delved into children's music after her daughter, Ariel, was born in 1977. "The very first song I did write for children was at her suggestion," said Arnold. "I remember it. She said, 'Let's write a song.' I said, 'OK, what should it be about?' She said, 'How about a short giraffe on a crooked path?' It's the kind of thing that makes songwriters' eyes light up. It was such a perfect beginning. I just took off from there."

The idea turned into the song "Do You Know What Magic Is?" which leads off her first recording, called "Make Believe." It was self-produced in 1986.

Arnold performed extensively in and around her hometown of Santa Cruz. She helped found the nationally syndicated radio show, Pickleberry Pie, a program of contemporary children's music.

Arnold was showcased on the Disney Channel's Kaleidoscope Concert Series, bringing her work to the attention of A&M; Records. Her signing with A&M; in 1988 was a significant achievement. A&M; is recognized as the music company which started the children's recording boom by signing kiddie superstar Raffi, and, later, Sharon, Lois and Bram.

Arnold now has four recordings and a video. A fifth recording, "Lullaby Land," is due out in the fall.

Arnold's voice is sweet, almost motherly, but with an energized edge. Her songs cover the gamut of musical styles -- there's a little bit of blues, Broadway, rock and, of course, folk.

Often working alongside Arnold is her daughter, who decided to change her name to Katy when she was 5 because, Arnold said, the little girl had trouble pronouncing her given name. Katy sings solos and often travels with her mother.

"I really enjoy it. We're great friends," said Arnold. "We have our moments. She's 16 now; you'd better believe we have our moments. It's been a great self-esteem experience for her. She's learned the value of hard work. She's seen me work hard. She has no illusions about a career in entertainment."

Arnold's 10-year-old son Toby also sometimes performs with her. "A lot of the songs that I have written have come out of the experience of being a parent," said Arnold. "I think it's important to support families and bring children positive imagery and music that affirms their feelings and helps them enjoy childhood."

"My work in the future, now that my children are older, I'm sure will evolve. I may become more involved in political and environmental issues, coming full circle back to what I used to do."

Arnold performs at 3 p.m. today in the Cabaret Tent. The Mask Messengers, a troupe of "physical theater" artists, will begin the family event with a 2 p.m. performance.