

Highly individual protest

IT has been claimed that the influences on Roy Harper's songs range from T S Eliot to Nietzsche. Maybe. But moderately the basis of Harper's music lie more obviously in the 1960s: The works of Ginsberg and the songs of Mort Sahl and Bob Dylan.

Whatever these influences it was evident when Roy Harper performed at St Donat's Arts Centre on Saturday evening that his art is highly individual. Not only because of the words to his songs—for there are other poets of protest—but because of his creative use of electronically-amplified and manipulated guitar sound.

Those who thought of the folk singer, or of the protest singer, as one who

By IFAN PAYNE

strums a guitar and blows into a harmonica strapped around his neck were in for a surprise. Roy Harper alters the sound of his guitar by the use of volume pedal and electronic echo so that he often sounds like the complete Oregon group at full blast.

And, far from being a brief folk frolic, some of the songs, like his evocation of contemporary Albion ("dole queue, the Government must love me because it keeps me out of work") are built into extended sonic dramas.

I can't say that Harper was at his best on Saturday evening. After all a concert which starts almost half an hour late

and which contains only four songs in its first half, is not without its irksome side. However there were the comensations of old favourites like *Old Cricketer* introduced as "A song I wrote to commemorate all those who stand at silly mid-on, wherever that may be." And the audience-pleasing *Another Day*. All in all then there was much to admire in the skill of Harper's performance.

Is music inseparable from its social context? I don't know. But it is incongruous to find a performer singing songs of protest against sulphur poisoning, environmental pollution and the ravages of our plastic society while performing in a dense lung-rotting, eye-smarting cigarette fug.