A
vant-garde singer Joan
La Barbara said she
has taken her voice
about 95 percent of
where it can go and is
now expanding her in-
strument through other artists.
La Barbara will present Vocal
Windows, a multi-faceted art excur-
sion utilizing her voice with videos,
movement and art at 8 p.m. tonight.

By MELISSA ADAMS

Saturday and Sunday at the Center
for Contemporary Arts.
The show also features the video
expertise of Steina Vasulkas, the
directorial talents of Barbara Karp,
and the artistry of Lita Albuquerque.

"I've been trying to expand from
straight concert situations and it's
intrigued me to go into the direction
of the theater, which I've always
loved," La Barbara said.

She has expanded her three-octave
voice into realms of what many
consider the avant-garde, using elec-
tronics to stretch her vocal instru-
ment to the limits.

"One way I looked at expanding
was through the visual arts," she
said. "By going to masters in various
disciplines, I got inspiration from
imagery and translated it into soul.

"Barbara has worked for years
conceptualizing and staging music in
visual scenes. Lita has made wonder-
ful sculptures, performance pieces
and paintings," she said. "Steina and
I started working together on interac-
tive voice and video, to visualize the
voice through video without a film
score."

La Barbara also felt the three
artists could add new dimensions to
the delivery of her own compositions.

"Visual artists hear sound and
think images. I was curious to find
out what the visual images of the
sound looked like," she said.

Karp, who is known for her imagi-
native stage productions of operas
and other performance pieces, is
moving toward more improvisational
work.

"The experience is very interesting
and sometimes difficult. Each artist
sees things differently," Karp said,
adding that when she worked with La
Barbara on the conceptualization she
had to first discover her own dynamic
motivation. "I had to see how it fits."

Working with other artists from
varying backgrounds has been an education for the artists.

"It takes us places we haven't
been," said Karp, who was trained as
pianist and then took off in stage
directing.

"People from other disciplines
think differently," La Barbara said.
She was trained as an opera diva but felt her flexibility was limited in opera. "I felt I had creative ideas that were being suppressed," she said.

She said she rebelled and ran away from opera, moving into jazz and electronic music. "I started imitating instruments and then my voice became an instrument. I wanted my voice to be an equal partner," she said. She experimented with new music and with such musicians as Anthony Braxton and Philip Glass, but found she still wanted to go beyond. "It was a more personal journey," she said.

"Visual artists hear sound and think images. I was curious to find out what the visual images of sound looked like."

"In this piece," La Barbara said, "the shape of video image is controlled and affected by the sounds of voice."

She is continually working with Vasulkas since they both live in the Santa Fe area. "Usually when Joan sings, she shapes songs through her vocal chords to project into space," Vasulkas explained. "We are shaping landscapes and patterns according to songs she sings. It's highly interactive." La Barbara's solo selection, Performance Piece, is an improvisational exploration into vocal gestures and speech that involves what she calls the feelings of performance. Another unique facet of the show is that it physically moves the audience from place to place. For example, while the show begins inside the theater, Karp soon moves the audience to an outside area and then into a sound stage for the presentation of Berlin Traume (Berlin Dream), which is augmented by Albuquerque's slides and other visual affects.

La Barbara explained that the final piece, Winds of the Canyon, was inspired by a Santo Domingo corn dance. In it, she interweaves her live voice with electronically mastered vocalizations.

She has recorded nine records and continues to do concerts. "Now I keep looking at other cultures for vocal materials and styles to expand what I can do." Tonight's performance features four separate pieces, beginning with Vocal Windows, an effort utilizing the talents of Vasulkas and her husband, Melissa Adams has been a feature writer for The New Mexican for a number of years.