

Themes of space, time and politics orbiting through Laurie Anderson's experimental work are wedded in *The End of the Moon*. The performance stems from her two-year stint as Nasa's first artist-in-residence, when she mixed with rocket scientists at the space agency's research centres.

The End of the Moon looks at the relationships between war, time, aesthetics, spirituality and consumerism. It is an ambitious and intriguing work, which combines stories, music and visuals. She is touring 15 years after launching her recording career with surprise hit *O Superman* from her first album *Big Science*.

Anderson, 58, says: "Time is the overall general theme for *The End of the Moon*. Our perception of time and how it affects us, how it changes us. ...

"It is about the queasy feelings you might have later – after going places and doing stuff. It's dreamy and abstract. There is trepidation about the future. There's uncertainty. It's my best attempt at describing life at this moment."

The performance also reflects a sense of melancholy she feels about the George Bush administration. With her long-term partner Lou Reed, she campaigned against the second invasion of Iraq.

She says: "It is not just a sense of melancholy, more like loss. I think what I lost was a country. The last three years have been pretty tough, pretty alienating for a lot of people. In this piece I'm trying to look at some of those things."

Previously a creator of large-scale theatrical works and known for her groundbreaking use of technology, Anderson makes *The End of the Moon* a surprisingly stripped-down performance. Her equipment, which used to travel in two trucks, now fits into two briefcases.

She says: "With new software I have a huge amount of flexibility, I can play so many gorgeous new sounds. It's like I'm finally learning how to improvise. My ambition is to be a troubadour and to express in a very light way."

This simpler outlook has been encouraged by Reed, with whom she has collaborated musically. Anderson, who lives in New York, says: "I do try to make things simpler and more to the point. Lou is very encouraging to me in this. If I'm hiding behind a simile, he'll say, 'Why don't you just say what you mean, instead of alluding to things all the time?' And sometimes he's really right."

Born in Chicago, Laurie studied classical violin as a child and took a degree in sculpture. As a young artist in New York in the 1970s she once stood on a block of ice, playing her violin while wearing ice skates. When the ice melted, the performance ended.

A pioneering musician and artist, she has released seven albums and her visual art has been shown across the world. In 2002 she was given \$20,000 (£10,000) funding as artist-in-residence at Nasa. Her interests at this time included three-dimensional sound imaging and nanotechnology.

She says: "Obviously my first question at Nasa was, 'Can I go up?' I would have given anything to go up there. However, the answer was no. But I loved meeting the scientists and designers and of course I got to see a lot of amazing things."

Anderson travels to the North-East after a visual and musical installation and series of concerts at

Laurie Anderson, composer, visual artist, poet, photographer, filmmaker, vocalist and musician, wants to be a troubadour. **Clare Clayton** caught up with her before a Sage performance.

Space oddity

World Expo 05 in Japan..

She is also undertaking a series of 10-day walks across the world. One walk was along the Ridgeway in Wiltshire. "I kept thinking I'm going to have some ideas on these walks, or that I'm going to be able to walk out a problem, but no – my mind sort of goes blank. I have been dazzled by beauty," she says. "I love looking up at huge oak trees and watching the way the branches stand out against the sky. That to me can take up the whole day. Kind of like when I was a child. I'm finding that the sky and weather and animals have a new fascination."

*: Forma, a Newcastle-based arts production company, presents and facilitates Laurie's show.

Forma is one of Europe's leading agencies for contemporary, cross-art form projects. It commissions, tours and publishes work worldwide, managing large-scale and technically innovative productions. The company also pioneers art projects. Laurie Anderson appears at The Sage Gateshead on May 1 as part of 2005 Alive.