

COCKBURN: Legendary performer will headline festival

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on the Billboard Hot 100 in the U.S. in June 1980, earning Cockburn an appearance on Saturday Night Live. Through the 1980s Cockburn’s song-writing became increasingly urban, global and political as he became more involved with progressive causes, with his second U.S. radio hit, “If I Had a Rocket Launcher,” from the “Stealing Fire” album.

He had written the song a year earlier, after visiting Guatemalan refugee camps in Mexico that were attacked by Guatemalan military helicopters.

His newest recording, “Bone On Bone,” Cockburn’s 33rd album, arrives with 11 new songs, including “3 Al Purdys,” a brilliant six-minute epic that pays tribute to Purdy’s poetry.

Cockburn explains its genesis: “I went out and got Purdy’s collected works, which is an incredible book. Then I had this vision of a homeless guy who is obsessed with Purdy’s poetry, and he’s ranting it on the street. The song is written in the voice of that character. The chorus goes, ‘I’ll give you three Al Purdys for a twenty dollar bill.’ Here’s this grey-haired dude, coattails flapping in the wind, being mistaken for the sort of addled ranters you run into on the street – except he’s not really ranting, he’s reciting Al Purdy. The spoken

word parts of the track are excerpts from Purdy’s poems. After that, once the ice was broken, the songs just started coming.”

“Bone on Bone” amounts to the deepest expression of Cockburn’s spiritual concerns to date. The 12-time Juno winner and Canadian Music Hall of Fame inductee turned away from traditional Christianity in the mid-1970s toward a quest for the more all-inclusive mysticism he documents in his memoir. And it’s that kind of spirituality that figures prominently in “Jesus Train” and “Twelve Gates to the City.” In “Looking and Waiting,” Cockburn sings of “scanning the skies for a beacon” from the divine. “It’s a song of faith and frustration,” says Cockburn of the latter. “Tired of looking in from the outside.”

“My MO has always been to be aware of the divine... that dimension... always dealing with being stuck in a kind of observer’s position with respect to all that,” he said. “I know it’s there. I don’t really see as faith so much as knowledge. Others may have different ideas about those things, but for me, I don’t have to struggle to believe in God, or the notion that God cares what happens to me. But I do have to struggle with being in a conscious, intentional relationship. That underlies a lot of these songs.”

“Forty Years in the Wilderness” ranks alongside “Pacing the Cage” or “All the Diamonds” as one of Cockburn’s most starkly beautiful folk songs.

“ There have been so many times in my life when an invitation has come from somewhere... the cosmos... the divine... to step out of the familiar into something new. — Bruce Cockburn

“There have been so many times in my life when an invitation has come from somewhere... the cosmos... the divine... to step out of the familiar into something new. I’ve found it’s best to listen for, and follow, these promptings. The song is really about that. You can stay with what you know or you can pack your bag and go where



PHOTO PROVIDED

Bruce Cockburn will headline the 2019 Sisters Folk Festival.

you’re called, even if it seems weird... even if you can’t see why or where you’ll end up.” Tickets for the Sisters Folk Festival, September 6-8, are \$170 for All Event Passes, \$55 for youth 18 and under for the weekend with

45+ artists performing and providing workshops. There are no individual tickets for Friday and Saturday. Tickets can be purchased at www.sistersfolkfestival.org/tickets, or call the festival office at 541-549-4979.

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