

review

Fishbowl follies: 'I feel like one big giant smile'

"I moved to Oregon from the city . . . and the songs just started coming out."

OREGON! Here we are, in Eugene, in the middle of Oregon, in the middle of Kathy Smith's songs, her singing, her playing, her presence. And her presence is often. Unusual. Seems a person with her "talent," and her recognition through record albums, and her ability to perform in front of an audience would transport her to "stardom." Album promotions. Concert tours. Television. THE WORLD!

But we're still in Eugene. With her.

For someone who has such commercial potential, she is determined to still be with us. Often you see the signs around campus: they say KATHY SMITH coming to play somewhere. Not just any somewhere, but here. Eugene.

"Hey, did you hear Kathy Smith's gonna be here next week?"

"No, that's far out. Where?"

Flocks of people, ambling around campus—everybody's readin' them signs (everyone's havin' those same old dreams . . .), KATHY SMITH coming.

She begins her concert by getting to know the piano. Not just start in. Not pushing the keys to deadness. Gently rolling over them. Spinning melodies while rolling her fingers over the keys. Getting to know them. Gently mingling with the evening.

Then, the first song. Long piano introduction. Sweet soothing voice beings. Singing of wagons, and traveling and 100 miles and "going h o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o m e . . ." A loooooooooooooong, sweet home, crystal clear, confident, home is there, you know it, she sings it.

Her voice surrounds the fishbowl. Transforms it—not instantly, but continually. Empty wanderers peeking through entrance doors, coming from the cold outside to the warm Kathy Smith presence, voice, song. First the cold outsiders are attracted to the culinary: a sign behind the counter screams POPCORN! and the 10 people long line to wait to get hamburger, coke, shake, fries, FOOD. But Kathy Smith's voice weaves through the air, surrounding the fishbowl, engulfing listeners.

She's singing just to you. And then again she sings to all of you. "Darling, there have been so many songs gone by . . ."

The songs continue without breaking-

up APPPPPPPLAUSE in the middle, she weaves her songs together with piano interlude.

She is asking all who are there to "touch my soul" as she touches theirs. It's her voice that's the best. It is so clear, so beautiful and surely heartfelt, the emotion, it comes through, no blockades, interruptions, barriers. And she can control it—sometimes her voice strays and wanders through varied chords in instants of times, yet she is in full control, she knows where her voice is, and where it is going, and so many times it ends up on a long, feeling tone of pleasure, happy to be here, happy you're here.

"So many people wandering lonely,
"Out looking for their one and only . . ."

During her concert, other instrumentalists appear. Quiet harmonies and accompaniment with acoustic guitar, skin drum, violin, piano. Harmonies trickle in, and a bottom bass piano set of chords unassumingly emerges. People helping with the music. On and on.

A song extends into instrumentation. Just a rhythm, thriving. Swaying back and forth for a few moments in time. The crowd of people filling the fishbowl, mesmerized. Along for the ride. And Kathy Smith tells them:

"You know, there is really only one ingredient to singing and playing music, and to living. It's surrender. I mean, there are other ingredients. Like love. But surrender is so far out, because we're not playing the music, it's playing us."

Kathy Smith's music definitely has a message. It's a "get together love one another" message, in nearly all of her songs. Not only do you feel good while listening to her music, you feel calmed and peaceful. Optimistic.

And while some will tell you that such optimism is a lot of commercial rot, and things can't be good, not that good, well, it's just not true with Kathy Smith and how she appears. She's convinced, she has conviction, she is undaunted. Doubters will not get at her undying optimism for life. She will not ignore them, she will embrace them. Doubters are part of life, and are part of each and every one of us, she would say.

At least, that's how she comes off in concert.

And it's a tremendous uplift to be there with her while she is singing and playing. It's a truly calming experience.

At the end of a song, she tells the people in the fishbowl, as she strums her guitar, strumming, strumming, "I ain't quitting until there's a single spirit in this room." People start clapping in rhythm, start smiling, start swaying, start "getting together." She smiles.

She stares, during the middle of a song, at one person listening to her. She stares, then says, "YOU, you, you, you, you, you, . . . just let it be as easy as it is." Then she repeats it: "Just let it be as easy as it is." Flowing, flowing, people are sharing, that's her message. She adds, "You got it to give, now give it away." She smiles.

"We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord,

"And we know that our unity will one day be restored."



Photo by Eric Browne

"Order number 22, your order is ready!" CRINGE. Some people tense up—why the heck do they announce a hamburger order in the middle of one of Kathy Smith's long tones? Announcements like that one can sure dent any pure enjoyment of a song. But she appears unaffected. Smiles.

She says after the song, "I feel like one big giant smile," outstretching her arms. ". . . It feels good, seeing all of those smiles."

KATHY SMITH, KATHY SMITH, she's here, she's Eugene, she's beautiful and she's tonight. But in the fishbowl. There are advantages to having her perform at the fishbowl. For one thing, it's free. And the atmosphere is one of open enclosure: her voice takes in everyone, but everyone is free to do as they wish. And it makes her appearance not as formal a split between "performer" and "audience." But the fishbowl hurts, also. Various announcements from the EMU loudspeakers interrupt the singing to some extent, and there are always noises from various parts of the crowd of people, simply because people aren't used to having the fishbowl being a music arena on weekday nights yet. People, people walking through, talking, passing through.

But, on the whole, Kathy Smith's presence at the fishbowl is worthwhile to experience.

She's here tonight at 8:30 in the fishbowl at the EMU, and if it was anything like Tuesday night's appearance, it will be exceptionally good.

Surrender yourself to Kathy Smith's music. Be enclosed in her "Circles of Love," and settle down for an evening of calming music, and absolutely beautiful singing and playing.

Clay Eals