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"It was a very, very intense place to be. There is all this emotional investment in learning because the things we talked about, that I talked about, were really important, were everyday life," DiFranco said. "It was a great experience with many influences, which taught me to talk about working for change."

The lyrics of DiFranco's songs deliver such strong desires for change that, at times, they are even a bit shocking to some listeners.

"Our father who art in a penthouse/sits in his 37th floor suite/and swivels to gaze down/at the city he made me in /he allows me to stand and solicit graffiti until/he needs the land I stand on." (From "Coming Up").

Shocking or not, DiFranco believes her message is vital and her position as a performer gives her the ability to deliver it loudly to many.

Although her lyrics are hard and uncompromising, she is quite modest and soft-spoken. The soft demeanor belies what is really a tough, strong-willed interior for a woman who sings against oppression and abuse, particularly of women struggling in a male-dominated world.

"I think it's really important to use the words that are used against you, because they're like

weapons," DiFranco said. "Language is a very powerful weapon. If I make it big — whatever that is — I look forward to that in terms of having the kind of power, to use as a tool, to make a change."

DiFranco said she has felt a resurgence of the "right-wing extremists" nationwide, who bring with them racism and homophobia, and her lyrics often speak out to those people for reform.

"I feel it's mostly stemming from intolerance and fear," she said. "Things were getting so spooky for awhile, with the OCA for example, I thought there was going to be a total release of pinned-up anger. Now it's funny, there's that typical American slow reform happening again."

One of her songs illustrates this opinion well, "the system gives you just enough to make you think that you see change. They will sing you right to sleep and then they'll screw you just the same."

DiFranco said she finds music to be the most powerful vehicle for addressing issues and keeping them alive and openly discussed.

"There's so many things that should always be brought up," DiFranco said. "Music is so close to who we are, it's like everybody does it and everybody needs it. It's an excellent way to talk to people and cross boundaries."

DiFranco will be crossing her boundaries and expressing her views through song at 8 p.m. May 21.

— Calley Anderson



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