

John Henry's Dance Nights


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Wednesdays: 10 pm Justice League of America presents Dance Hall House Tunes (Ladies Free)

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"The first time Measure 9 was on the ballot, I made this sculpture. It was my way to participate [in] the election, besides voting against it. It still is. ... I dedicated the sculpture to the [Oregon Citizens Alliance], as written on the plate supporting the head. I thought I could use it again this second time as my small contribution against it."

— Latifah Troncelliti, Italian graduate teaching fellow

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Strong messages are Near

Two political musicians will join forces in a concert at Agate Hall on Saturday

By Monica Hande
Oregon Daily Emerald

After 25 years of existence, Mother Kali's Books is celebrating its survival and its success. The independent, feminist bookstore is hosting an anniversary celebration Saturday at Agate Hall at the University. After a variety of daytime events, singers Irene Farrera and Holly Near will headline the celebration, extending their political activism.



Nationally recognized political activists Holly Near (left), from California, and Irene Farrera, from Eugene, will deliver their messages through their music in Eugene Saturday.

Twenty-five years is a long time for an independent bookstore to survive, said Tova, co-manager of Mother Kali's, and it's a special treat to be able to celebrate it. The anniversary celebration is in part to encourage support for businesses like Mother Kali's, she said.

"It's really important to support independent bookstores so they don't get swallowed up by big businesses," she said. Many small bookstores have recently been put out of business by larger companies.

Besides support, entertainment is an important reason for the celebration, Tova said.

Mother Kali's sees itself not only as a bookstore, she said, but also as a community center, which is why most of the entertainment scheduled for Saturday involves local artists.

"We wanted to really make sure it was a community event," Tova said.

And that goal was achieved by including local talent not only during the day but also during the evening concert.

Farrera will open the concert. Although she lives in Eugene, she rarely performs local concerts. Much of her time is spent performing shows throughout the country.

"It's a real treat to do a home performance," she said.

Farrera, originally from Venezuela, was influenced by music at a very young age.

"I think it was really something I was born with," she said of her music talent. "Ever since I was a little kid, I was fascinated with music. It was something I had with me since I was brought into this world."

Farrera's music has a rich Venezuelan influence. Sung in both English and Spanish, her lyrics proffer a political message.

"I really like to send out the message ... for unity of the American continent," she said.

Living as a Latin-American, Farrera recognizes a need for a binding relationship between both parts of the continent. Her goal is to help people realize that they can make

changes in the world through individual activism.

The purpose of her music is for "uplifting people," she said, "making them aware and inspired."

Farrera said she is excited to be performing at a concert with Near, a nationally recognized musician and activist.

"I actually think our messages are very similar," Farrera said.

Near, who has been performing nationally since 1972, is also excited about the Eugene performance.

"I'm very happy to be there and share the evening with Irene Farrera," she said.

Near, originally from Ukiah, Calif., has performed in Eugene many times and appreciates the city's politically aware community. She is familiar with Mother Kali's and is excited to celebrate the anniversary of a bookstore devoted to feminist literature.

"You're celebrating the building of something that's still very important," she said.

Near's ties to Eugene begin with her sister, who opened a dance company at the WOW Hall, where Near frequently performed.

She grew up in a politically and socially active family. Her parents introduced her to a large variety of music, and considering they did not own a television set, music became their communication center, and that's where her musical inspiration began, she said.

"I was born with a voice," she said. "[Singing] was a very natural thing to do."

Near continued her passion for singing and theater, which she also became interested in as she was growing up. She said it was a performance she did in the Broadway production "Hair" that made her more aware of the anti-war movement and inspired her to deliver a message with her singing.

"I became interested in how I could participate," she said.

And she became successful simply because people liked what she did, she said.

"I became quite well known as a singer of political music."

However, the music Near performed and the messages she delivered were not well-supported by much of the public, she said. She was singing about civil rights and homosexuality, for example, before they were acceptable.

Her job as a young woman "became to unveil the secrets, to say these words out loud," she said.

Near said her art was not invited into the mainstream, so she had to make a decision about whether to continue.

"I decided that it was pretty damn exciting what I was doing," she said, "and I would accept the consequences."

Although Near was a strong voice for the women's and civil rights movements, she said it was a combined effort of all activists.

"We were these young warriors," she said. The "we" referred to the "women and men who challenge the status quo through our art and have a feminist perspective."

Near is currently touring with two men, Italian-American pianist John Bucchino and African-American singer Andre Santos, who both contributed to her most recent album, "Edge." Doors open for the Saturday concert at 7 p.m. Farrera performs at 7:30 p.m., and Near takes the stage at 8:30 p.m. The Eugene-based Deb Cleveland Band will perform at a dance following the concert. Concert tickets are \$16.50 and are available at Mother Kali's, CD World, the EMU ticket office and at the door. For more information about the celebration, visit www.motherkalis.com/25th.html.

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