

Newman's latest release is purely American

The album *Songbook Vol. 1* contains 'stripped down' re-recordings of Randy Newman's classics

By **Ryan Nyburg**
Senior Pulse Reporter

Randy Newman is probably the most purely American singer/songwriter this country has ever produced. I mean this in the best way possible. His songs have often represented a sad, cynical — but always honest — vision of this country that tell how things are rather than how they should be.

In "The Randy Newman Songbook Vol. 1," he takes a few of his best songs — some dating back as early as 1966 — and records them simply and evocatively, with only his own piano playing as accompaniment. This album is essentially a studio-produced document of the kind of performances he does live, with the songs stripped down to their bare essence, much in the style of the first of Johnny Cash's "American Recordings" albums or the Ella Fitzgerald "Songbooks" series.

An obvious question regarding a project such as this is: why? What purpose is served by re-recording old songs, particularly ones that are pretty well fixed in the minds of anyone who heard the originals? Newman answers this pretty well in the opening track, "It's Lonely at the Top," a song that was originally written for, and subsequently rejected by, Frank Sinatra.

Without any string arrangements or background vocals added, Newman's

compositional skill is allowed to shine through. While the production on his songs wasn't always bad, it also wasn't always necessary, and the man is often at his best on his own. Lush production values are often beside the point when it comes to great songwriting, and Newman's songwriting is top class. The style doesn't work for every song in this collection; selections such as "You Can Leave Your Hat On" lack the power a backing band could give it.

But this method is the exception rather than the rule. The beauty of songs like "Louisiana 1927" or "Marie" is best served by this bare-bones style, which gives the melodies room to spread out. And without anything to get in the way, the messages behind Newman's songs are unhindered, with many of the satirical barbs hitting just as hard as they did 20 or 30 years ago. The almost cheerfully done "Political Science," describes the frame of mind America has toward the rest of the world just as well today as it did in 1972.

"Sail Away" and "Rednecks" both stab hard at racial assumptions. The first is sung from the perspective of a slave trader trying to tempt African natives onboard his boat; the second describes in detail the hypocrisy Northern states show in their perspectives of the South. Both songs further reveal a brave songwriter.

This bravery often takes the form of a lyrical bravado, such as in "God's Song (That's Why I Love Mankind)." How many songwriters could write a song from the perspective of an omnipotent being and pull it off? The song rings with a cynicism so pure as to proclaim the existence of God and then accuse humanity of blindly worshipping such a malignant force.



Courtesy

Singer/songwriter Randy Newman utilizes his piano and vocal talents on his new album, "The Randy Newman Songbook Vol. 1."

Newman's cynicism is an intelligent cynicism, however, and he's smart enough to know not to be bitter or to wallow in self-pity. He doesn't hold himself above the culture his satire attacks and often seems more sad than angry at the way things are these days. The best

expression of this is probably "The World Isn't Fair," which invites Karl Marx to come and look at how the world turned out. "... I'm glad I'm living in the land of the free / Where the rich just get richer / And the poor you don't have to see / It would depress us, Karl / Because we still care/

That the world isn't fair." Randy Newman will be performing Friday at 7:30 p.m. at the Shedd Concert Hall on 868 High St. as part of the Oregon Festival of American Music.

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Campus gallery gives students chance to show art

Each week, the LaVerne Krause Gallery displays works from three students

By **Natasha Chilingierian**
Pulse Reporter

Art students don't need to wait until they graduate to see their creations in a gallery — they can exhibit right here on campus. Every week, three art students take work out of their studios and into the LaVerne Krause Gallery

— located in Lawrence Hall — for all to see, interpret and critique.

Graduate art student and LaVerne Krause Gallery Coordinator Jennifer Zimmerman said the gallery gives students a chance to receive feedback on their work.

"It's an experimental place for students," she said. "They can get their work evaluated by students, faculty and the public. It's a step further from the studio."

Students apply to exhibit their work at least one term before the po-

tential showing. Sana Krusoe, art associate professor and LaVerne Krause Gallery committee member, said the committee tries to accommodate all artists, except during spring term when the gallery is largely filled by graduate student projects.

"We support student work of all sorts," Krusoe said. "That includes work that is risky, edgy and less-than-professional quality."

New artwork is placed every week-end and taken down the following Friday. An opening reception takes

place at the gallery every Monday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Student-run art galleries have existed at the University since the 1960s. Students used the Lawrence Hall lobby across from the courtyard to exhibit work throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1970s, students converted room 141 in Lawrence Hall into "Gallery 141," which existed until the early 1990s. Students eventually left 141, which was turned into a classroom, and in exchange moved the gallery to the room which is now

the LaVerne Krause Gallery.

Art Professor Ken O'Connell said art department faculty and students chose to name the gallery after the late printmaking Professor LaVerne Krause because of her dedication to exhibiting student work. Krause died in 1987.

"LaVerne would exhibit artwork in the backs of restaurants and taverns — anything with a hallway," O'Connell said. "She always encouraged

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