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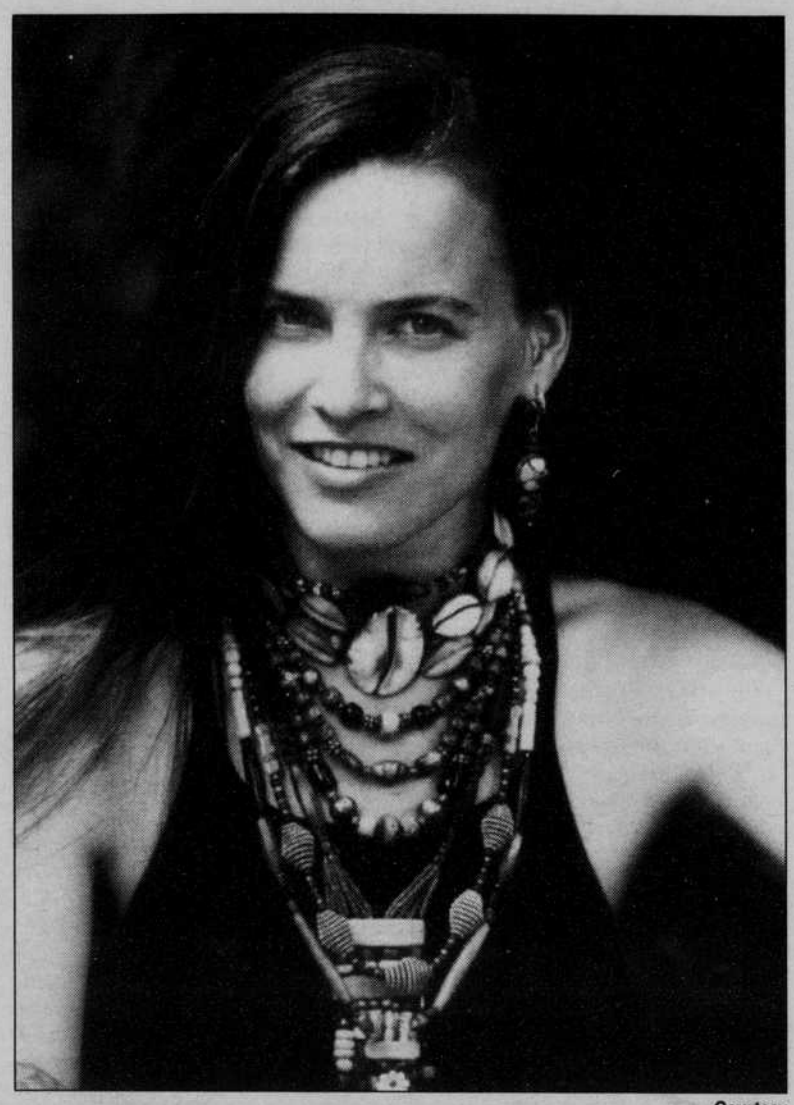
Musician Graves discusses her inspiration, motivation

Joules Graves began as an activist and later learned how to use music as a form of political expression

By Natasha Chilingerian
Pulse Reporter



Courtesy
Singer and songwriter Joules Graves will perform at the WOW Hall at 8 p.m. Saturday.

Earth-friendly singer and songwriter Joules Graves has celebrated her love for life and the planet in her music for the past 12 years. Graves, originally from Missouri, also lived in Chicago and Europe before eventually settling in the Seattle area.

Graves began singing during a six-month encampment organized to protest the Gulf War, and soon after she was invited to play at colleges, Earth Day celebrations, festivals and women's events across the Pacific Northwest and beyond. She talked to the Emerald about her music, connecting to nature, hitchhiking and her new band.

Emerald: I read that you were an activist before you became a musician. Was speaking out for peace what inspired you to start playing?

Graves: Absolutely. I was involved in a protest against the Gulf War — a six-month encampment back in 1990 and 1991. I just started singing my poetry and it's really taken off from there.

Emerald: It sounds like you're really in tune with Mother Nature. How do you express this love for the planet in your music?

Graves: It's expressed in the lyrics and the feeling of it. The songs come from my heart. I put in all the passion that I feel for the beauty of nature, and I also take a stand to say, "Stop abusing this beautiful place." That's in a lot of my songs.

Emerald: Tell me about your new musical project, Rhythmethod.

Graves: I'm working with Marcos Deslury and Diano Garcia and they are both in a band called Ancestor Radio. Diano Garcia is playing traditional West African drums, and he brings a West African knowledge with him. Marcos Deslury is playing bass guitar. They have the rhythm section, and they're very tight with each other. They're also doing harmony vocals. It's very beautiful; it's very exciting to work with them. Marcos Deslury has a master's degree in musical composition and he knows many different forms of music, so I'm learning a lot while getting to play with these guys. It's really fun.

Emerald: Tell me about your "Joining the Chorus of Life!" workshop.

Graves: The focus of that workshop is to help people access their own natural voice. It's not about getting people to sound any certain way, by telling them they're supposed to shape their throat or their mouth any certain way. It's just to let people free, to let the sound of the self come out. It's based on something I learned years back — that the overtone of every person's voice is as unique as a thumbprint. Now, someone can imitate someone's voice but they can never imitate those overtones. It's about people setting themselves free to write a song and sing it to each other. It's a really beautiful empowerment that happens. Some people who have come to my workshops have gone on to make a CD of their own music and they haven't sung before. Some people come afraid of singing, like if someone told them they didn't have a good voice. I was told that as well. The workshop is based on a saying from Zimbabwe: "If you can talk, you can sing." It's a birthright to sing. Everybody can sing. That's what the workshop is about — having the freedom to just make the sounds we make. The most beautiful thing we can do is sound like our authentic selves.

Emerald: I read that you hitchhiked across the country at age 18. Would you recommend this to anyone?

Graves: No, not at all. I feel really fortunate that nothing really bad happened, and people are even weirder now than they were then. It's not a good idea. It was an adventure, and I can't say I wish I hadn't done it, but I would definitely tell people that I don't think they should do it.

Emerald: You lived in a Puget Sound island community without electricity, running water, car or telephone for five years. How did this lifestyle influence your music?

Graves: Oh, it was great for my music! I had the opportunity to learn about communities that are different from the capitalist nuclear family. It helped me to get beyond the concept of separateness. One of the main recurring themes in my music is that we are one. When I was in nature, I was able to spend a lot of time alone, but when I was around people we really had a connection. Because it was an island, we really came to depend on each other — like if the ferry wasn't running. We knew that we could help each other out. It broke down some of the concepts of isolation.

Emerald: I read that you have played at the Oregon Country Fair. What do you like most about the fair?

Graves: The thing I like most about it is the freedom for people to express their creativity. I've played at a lot of festivals across the country, and it's the most family-oriented and heath-conscious one of all. For example, there's good drinking water available for free. At many festivals you have to buy these tiny bottles of water for five bucks. That, to me, is one of the ugly examples of capitalism and people wanting to make as much money as possible. At the Oregon Country Fair there is a family-minded care for the people. They don't want people getting dehydrated. It's a great example of a celebration.

Emerald: Any plans for the future?

Graves: Definitely. I'm working on a new record label right now. I will announce its name at the show. I've had record labels in the past, but this one is going to be more of a collective thing. It will get away from the competitive concepts in music. I want to take what I have learned and gained along my path and share it with others.

Graves will perform at the WOW Hall Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are $10 in advance and $15 at the door, and are available at WOW Hall and the UO Ticket Office.

Contact the Pulse reporter at natashachilingerian@dailyemerald.com.

Sports Illustrated on campus
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