

Natalie
Merchant

PHOTO MY MARK SELIGER

Merchant's 'Leave Your Sleep' tour arrives in Portland with a show for fans new and old

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

For the tuned in, brought up youths of the 1980s, Natalie Merchant's lilting quiver was a siren's song; a soothing intellectual voice for a generation of young Americans.

Her audience has grown up with her, and with her latest tour, they're bringing their kids along.

At 16 years old, disenchanting with high school bureaucracy, Merchant began college on an advanced placement track. It was while she was a DJ for her college radio station that she met the other members of what was to become 10,000 Maniacs. Between 1981 and 1993, Merchant's lyrics and voice were among the most iconic sounds in the new alternative music scene.

Since 1993, Merchant has had a successful solo career, and on Oct. 4 she will be performing with the Oregon Symphony at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Her most recent album, "Leave Your Sleep"

(2010), brings to life poetry written about and by children of the Victorian era, and more recently, the hearts of New York City school children. The album, which took more than five years to produce, was a gift for her daughter, but it has become a gift to children of all ages.

Over the phone, Merchant's voice is as glorious when she speaks as when she sings. She's explaining why she is late in calling for the interview, and I find myself engaged in an organic conversation with one of the most remarkable voices of the last quarter century.

She starts our conversation by telling me about the one she just left after dropping her daughter off at school.

Natalie Merchant: There has been a case of whooping cough at our school. So I was having a conversation revolving around immunizations and Victorian child death. It's amazing how many illnesses we just don't deal with because we immunize.

Sue Zalokar: We have had 650 cases reported in Portland this year — more than twice as many as this time last year. That alone is a good argument for immunizing children.

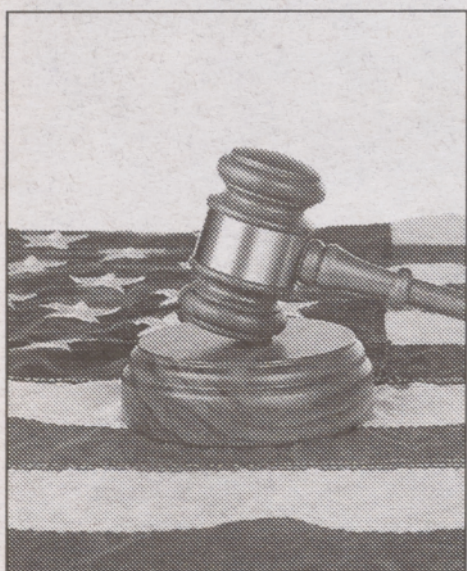
N.M.: Woodstock (New York) is well known for families that don't immunize. Actually when I had my child, I lived on the other side of the river from Woodstock. I was told not to take my child across the river until she was a year old because there is so much meningitis and whooping cough.

S.Z.: Did you immunize your daughter?

N.M.: I did because I travel frequently and we lived in Spain quite a bit. My husband is Spanish. We lived on the Southern coast of Spain. It just felt like the responsible thing to do. I did a lot of research. It was the thimerosal that was really frightening, but our pediatrician was able to ensure

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