

AMY RAY, from page 8

“Didn’t It Feel Kinder” and it went really well. We fought a lot – like a brother and sister – but in a creative way and I really respect him. He really pushed me – hard – that’s probably why we fought.

With this record, I decided to be open. We would sit together and throw back and forth chord progressions. He didn’t collaborate on the lyrics with me, we worked on melody and chords. It was exactly what I needed, someone to teach me. He’s a very good teacher. That partnership brought me so many ideas about songwriting that I use now, even when he’s not around.

**S.Z.:** You have a band that backs you when you tour that features Portland-based musician, Kaia Wilson who was a founding member of the queercore punk band, Team Dresch and of The Butchies. How does this departure from the folk-style of the Indigo Girls round out your musical experience?

**A.R.:** I’m a big fan of punk – a big fan. I always have been. At some point, I had written a bunch of songs that just didn’t fit in with Indigo Girls, so in order to feel great about life and music, I wanted to explore that. I was a HUGE Team Dresch fan. Kaia and I just started jamming and we have played together ever since. She brings a lot into the room – Kaia does. She’s got a lot of history and experience. Musically, she’s a punk rocker, but she’s also kind of a pop writer. I always like the way it feels to have a punk song with a pop melody going on. It’s infectious.

**S.Z.:** Having said that, “Lung of Love” has a whisper of a country (bluegrass) music influence. On the new album the lyrics of “The Rock is my Foundation,” you sing “The rock is my foundation/with Jesus is at the base. /God is on the kidron / and the Holy Spirit sings. / All my life, I’ve been a sinner / all my life, I’ve gone astray / now sinner hang on, my sinner hang on / you gonna have your judgement day” Do you identify as a Christian?

**A.R.:** (Laughs) I’m sort of a pagan with Christian roots. I was raised Methodist. It stuck with me. I was a Religion major in college. Spirituality is very interesting to me. Religion is specifically interesting to me. The ‘industry’ of religion – what we have done to our spiritual beliefs through religion – is fascinating. When you’re raised Christian, especially in the South, I’m not sure you can ever get away from it, unless you’re fighting against it – which is a hard road. So, instead I’ve incorporated it into my cultural references. It’s part of my metaphor in life.

**S.Z.:** Have you any thoughts about groups who believe that being gay and being Christian cannot intertwine?

**A.R.:** Sure. From which perspective – the gay perspective or the Christian one?

**S.Z.:** Either, or both.

**A.R.:** You can get specific with specific churches and say, “Well this church has a very specific set of rules and one of them is anti-gay and I just can’t be part of that.” Or you can recognize all of these things that the experience taught you and decide, I’m gonna take a high road. I’m gonna be a part

worked. Greg produced my last album,

of the church still and try to change it from the inside out. Cynically, I feel like there are things that affect institutions that have nothing to do with religion – economics, church attendance, social evolution and so on.

I was just raised a certain way. Those symbols and metaphors and the spirituality of them is very important to me and so, I hang onto it.

I definitely go to a Methodist church sometimes in Atlanta that is VERY openly gay. I’m surprised they can be what they are and still be in the Methodist conference because they are sort of defying their own conference.

**S.Z.:** What’s the name of the church?

**A.R.:** St Marks Methodist in Atlanta. There are a lot of reasons why any of the world religions are hard for us as women, as gay women. I just don’t want to give it away. I want to have a piece of it still for myself.

**S.Z.:** What is the importance of passing gay marriage legislation?

**A.R.:** Well, I don’t care that much about marriage because that institution is one that I don’t relate to that much. Even as a straight person, I probably wouldn’t.

**S.Z.:** Amen sister. I always want to know why my gay friends want a piece of something that is so patriarchal. I support it, because from a civil rights stance, you have to.

**A.R.:** It’s a civil rights battle – a very important one. There are a lot of legal issues that are solved by being able to marry and have at least civil unions. We should call it something different. We should own it and have it be ours. Even if I don’t want it for myself, I’m gonna fight for it. It has definitely been denied to people for the wrong reason. It’s very important to me but at the same time, this is an institution steeped in patriarchy and a paradigm that has to do with ownership. We need to reinvent it somehow and own it for ourselves in a way that’s really beautiful. I just don’t know how to do that yet.

I do know that we should fight for access to it.

**S.Z.:** Social awareness and activism have always been a part of your songwriting, your individual persona and the Indigo Girls public persona. You have said, “Musicians can become the amplifiers of the people that are working in the trenches”. What have been your most successful or fulfilling moments as a social activist or amplifier?

**A.R.:** Oh God, there’s a zillion of them. A lot of the work we do is environmental work. There are specific projects: We worked with a group in New Orleans, Sweet Home New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina that helped put musicians back in houses who had left the city and had nowhere to live and were homeless. That was pretty fulfilling to see that happen.

There are a lot of people who are disenfranchised and they shouldn’t be. As a community, it enriches us to re-enfranchise people. And to have them in our communities in a functional way so that their voices count because it creates a richness.

Our goal, me and Emily, is about that. Bringing more voices into the community, building the community, having this diverse space where there are so many different opinions and voices and perspectives. In that way we can achieve more and create more and build a better society.

All of the social activism that Indigo Girls do is to that end. So it can be working in feminist realms or Native realms or housing or queer issues or really specific projects like hunger.

**S.Z.:** In 1993 you, Emily and Winona LaDuke began the organization Honor the Earth. Can you talk about the organization and your connection to Indigenous People of the Americas and the work that Honor the Earth does?

**A.R.:** This project probably has the most continuity in our career and the most longevity as far as one project that we have worked on for so long. This is some of the most rewarding social activism work we have done. We have been able to see the connection between all of the different battles and all of the activists we have known over the years. We have seen the way it helps for them to get press when they wouldn’t normally get it.

Music brings people together, so the Honor the Earth project has been incredibly fulfilling. And it keeps going.

**S.Z.:** If you weren’t playing music, what would you be doing?

**A.R.:** I would probably be a teacher, a high school teacher. (laughs) It might be what I’m doing later. I’d have to get my teaching certificate. I had one at one time, but then I got a bunch of gigs and didn’t end up teaching.

When I was in high school, the people that really made a difference were my high school teachers. I lived in a very rural community and I just feel like there is a need. There is always a need in rural communities and even urban communities that don’t have as many resources.

There is always a need for good teachers and people that really care and will really connect in the classroom and it’s hard to do that in places where it’s hard to draw those kinds of people or it’s hard to get enough teacher to work. It’s something I could do later in life and be really happy with.

The Indigo Girls will be performing Nov. 9, with the Oregon Symphony at the Arlene Schnitzer Hall.

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