

Emily Saliers: Keeping faith and the good fight

*Talking activism, faith
and the face of southern
poverty with Emily
Saliers of the folk duo
Indigo Girls*

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

Emily Saliers has been one half of the iconic folk duo, Indigo Girls for more than 30 years. In that time, her lyrics and musicianship have touched the hearts of innumerable fans as she sings about life as she experiences it.

In tandem with her musical partner, Amy Ray, Saliers has pioneered and paved a path for gay musicians, in many ways. They "came out" publicly in 1994, about six years after they gained mainstream musical acclaim. The pair had been out in their private lives for quite a while and, being the genuine ladies that they are, they decided coming out publicly only made sense.

The Indigo Girls are playing the Oregon Zoo again this year, on July 28, bringing their raw, yet tender and socially charged musical styling back to Portland. Last year, they made an appearance with the Oregon Symphony. I was in the audience that night with many other life-long Indigo Girls fans. One thing that struck me was the sound of these songs being played from the many voices of a symphony instead of two voices and two guitars. I asked Emily Saliers what that felt like to her as one of the composers of the songs.

Emily Saliers: The first time it



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMILY SALIERS

happened, it was absolutely mind blowing. It was so thrilling. In terms of the performance, for me and Amy, it was very challenging. We put a lot of time into practicing, preparing and rehearsing. There is the technical experience of it and then there is the experience of just hearing your songs orchestrated. It brings the songs to life and adds drama to them. It's thrilling. I still look forward to the symphony shows. They are unique experiences for us.

Sue Zalokar: *The Indigo Girls are about 27 years old?*

E.S.: It's more than that, really. Our first professional gig was in high school in 1980.

Just in terms of professional time together, it's been that long. We put out our first single independently in 1985 and then a full length single in 1987 and we were signed to Epic 1988. It's been a long damn time. It's quite remarkable. It's clear to both of us that our differences and our creative distance from each other is what really keeps it together.

The fact that we are so different in the way that we write and our vocal range is different, we play guitars differently and our sensibilities are different. That keeps it interesting for both of us. I get to experience music through Amy's style and sensibility and she through mine.

At the same time we have a similar set of

values. We're both interested in using our music as tools of change. We grew up together. Our families have experienced each others milestones. It is quite a deep journey that we've been on.

S.Z.: *You and Amy are equally well-known for your activism. What are you working on right now?*

E.S.: For me, personally, immigration equality is a huge issue. But the Indigo Girls next campaign is anti-death penalty. We're running a T-shirt campaign. The shirts will be available at the Portland show and we

See SALIERS, page 9



Albina Community Bank

Meet Your Local Branch Manager:



Mary Edmeades
Social Impact Banking
503.445.2155
medmeades@albinabank.com



"Communities aren't just streets and buildings. Communities are thriving places where cultures, commerce and souls grow stronger together."

- Mary

At Albina Community Bank the most ordinary financial transaction can have an extraordinary impact on our local community.

You're going to bank somewhere, why not let your banking make a difference in the places where you live and work?

VOODOO DOUGHNUT

THE MAGIC IS IN THE HOLE!

22 SW 3RD & BURNSIDE
1501 NE DAVIS

OPEN 24/7!

SUPPORTING STREET ROOTS SINCE 2003