

SAINTE-MARIE, from page 4

A lot of people in this stage of our life of contemporary issues are still buffaloes by the old "coin game." And some of us are not.

This racketeering has been going on since probably before the Old Testament. I was going to say the Roman Empire, but even longer than that. There is a kind of racketeering that has come down through the Middle East and Europe.

It's not all there is in the world. There are a lot of alternative choices that you can make. The first thing to do is to wake up. Open your eyes.

S.Z.: *Can we talk for a moment about the "silent years"? Your music was blacklisted by the administration at the time, likely because of the power of your songs. At that time, did that dissuade or ignite you?*

B.S.M.: I didn't have any thoughts. I was too busy, and nobody tells you when you are being blacklisted. I didn't find out that was happening until at least 20 – maybe more – years went by. It didn't faze me at all.

I just thought that in the United States of America, tastes had changed and people wanted The Mamas & the Papas now. I had no idea that it was any kind of political administration's silencing artists.

S.Z.: *"Power in the Blood," the title track to your album, is your spin on an Alabama 3 song. (Alabama 3 gained acclaim for their song "Woke Up This Morning," which became the theme song for HBO's series "The Sopranos.") You wrote new lyrics, turning the song inside out and reconfiguring it as an antiwar song – much different from the kind of call-to-war tone of the original song.*

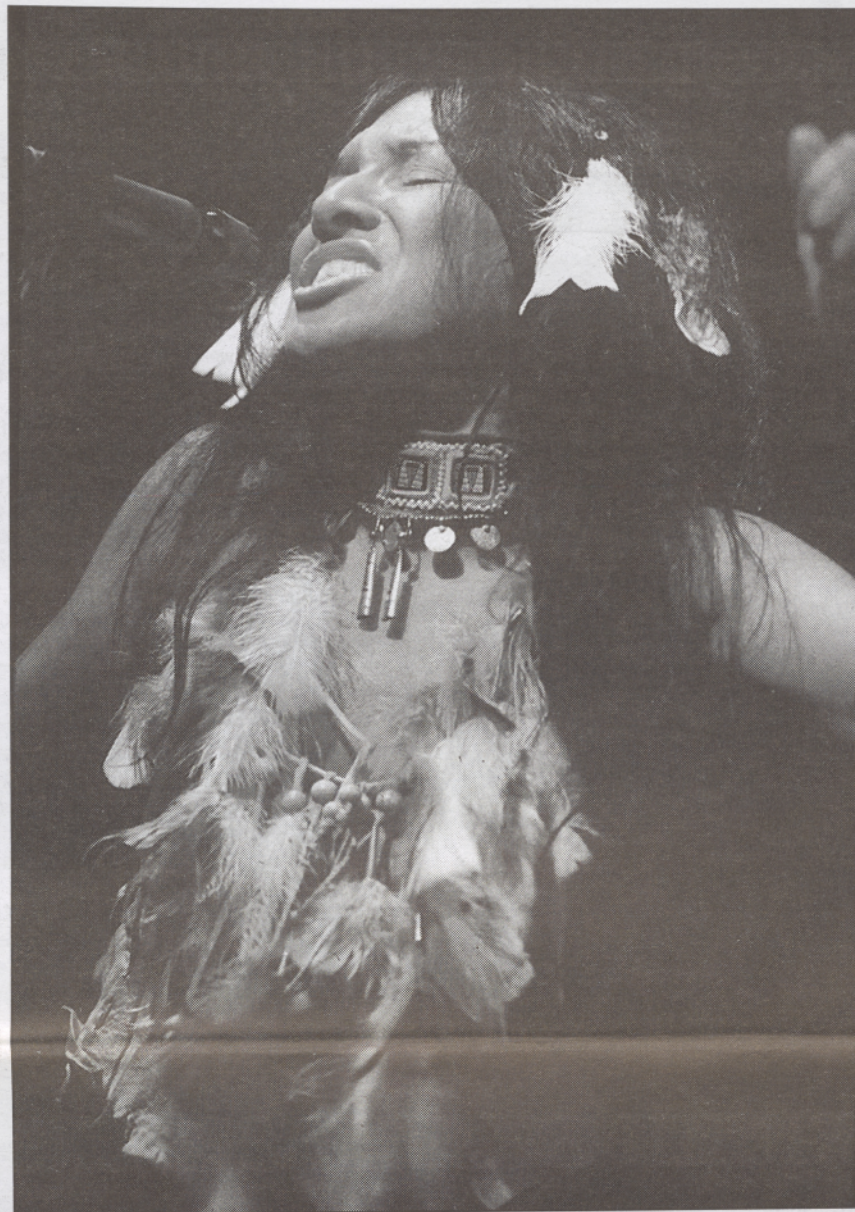
B.S.M.: I rewrote their words. I found out when I was traveling on a train in Paris that they were huge fans of mine. Our tour manager said, "You ever heard of Alabama 3?" And I said, "Oh my god! 'Woke Up This Morning' is one of my favorite songs, and I love 'Power in the Blood.'" Well, it turns out they were huge fans.

We did a long concert in Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, and they walked in on their knees (laughing), and it was all (applying English accent), "Buffy, you're a fucking legend."

We became immediate friends, and after the concert, we went over to their studio. They asked me to sing backup on one of their songs. We were talking about "Power in the Blood," which is really a very violent song. "And when that call, it comes, I will be ready for war ..." Yeah? Justice in the sword, they said.

I told them it would make a great peace song. They fell down on the floor, laughing, got up again and said OK. I changed those lyrics to real, contemporary issues because their song was already 10 to 12 years old. I contemporized it and made it a peace song instead of an eye-for-an-eye song. As Gandhi says, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

S.Z.: *You open and close the album in a spectacular way. "Carry it On" is joyous and inspiring. It carries a message similar to "It's My Way." You seem to be telling the listeners that they have a duty to themselves, their*



Buffy Sainte-Marie performs in the 1970s.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE

communities and the planet, or that's what I think. What does this song mean to you?

B.S.M.: Oh gosh, I think duty is a bit strong of a word. I'm just pointing out that we live in this incredible world and yet, because of human boneheadedness, we are under threat of shooting ourselves in the foot.

It's not something to be afraid of. It's something just to step up to. You know, it's like doing the dishes; you've got to do it all the time or it piles up on you. I know that is down home and folksy, but that's kind of my attitude to the world.

I'm not a combatant, at all. I'm really into alternative ways of looking at things. It comes naturally to me to do so and then to try to pass that on to people who are being advertised to death and conned in every which way. Buy this, buy that. Life is simpler than that.

"Carry It On" kind of tells it. When I do that song live, I recite that entire lyric before we even do the song: "Look right now and you will see/we're only here by the skin of our teeth as it is/so take heart and take care of your link with life and/carry it on ..." So people are really ready for it.

It isn't money that makes the world go around. I really believe that. That is the

corporate hallucination by which we are controlled. It's not as if we have to get up in arms and go and fight the world. No. You don't. No, no. Stay calm and decolonize.

S.Z.: *That would make a great meme.*

B.S.M.: I think it's already out there.

S.Z.: *You have done it all. In life, but also in this album. Like you, the album defies categorization. What were you thinking about conceptually as the album came together?*

B.S.M.: Nothing really. (Giggle) When we went on the road after "Running for the Drum" came out, I told my band that we were going on the road for a two-year world tour so they'd better have their passport ready, and this is like year six.

We were already doing (many of these songs) live, so it was real easy to put together a studio recording.

S.Z.: *You like electronic music. You liked it before it was part of the modern musical quiver. What attracts you to synthesized sound?*

B.S.M.: I always have, yes. Well yeah. Even on my first album, I was playing mouth

bow. I've never wanted to give people anything ordinary. I've always wanted to give people uniqueness. There was no point in trying to be a copycat Judy Collins. That wouldn't have worked for me.

Since I was a child, I have been interested in anything that made noise like a mouth bow or electronic squeaks or pots and pans or any instrument that I saw. It is fun and playful. That part comes easy to me.

S.Z.: *Would you comment on your involvement in the Idle No More movement?*

B.S.M.: They are an extension of what we have been doing for the last – well at least – 50 years of my career. I was talking about genocide and protecting the environment and aboriginal issues, Native American issues even on my very first album.

The movement, Idle No More, these things are continuations of a very long Native American tradition to resist corporate bullying.

S.Z.: *You've said that you sang "Now That the Buffalo's Gone" until you were sick of people coming to see "the little Indian girl cry. The change is going to have to come from within us, the Indian people." Do you see that change happening?*

B.S.M.: Oh! Absolutely. Over the last 50 years? Are you kidding? I mean we have Native American Ph.D.s in just about every field you can think of. We have people working at the grass-roots level, as well as in Ottawa and Washington, D.C. We have made incredible strides.

If you, as a non-Indian person, look at the daily headlines and the email political "shouting" that comes into your life, it's new for most people. It's a very long time coming. There has been a Native American resistance for a very long time.

Idle No More is a true grassroots movement, so it's a true reflection of what we do and how we do it. We're not a corporation. It's not the same old corporate sing song. It's a true grassroots movement – kind of like the Vietnam antiwar movement was in the '60s. Nobody designed that. Nobody put it together. It was a true, student-led movement. So, on some days, a lot of people are going to show up, and the next day not so many people will show up, and that has nothing to do with trends and statistics and polls. No. It's, who can do it? That's a very long human tradition: Who can do it does it.

S.Z.: *You must know what a powerful presence you are in the world. Does that ever feel heavy?*

B.S.M.: I don't feel any responsibility for the world. I pretty much just do what I want to do. I've been doing this for a very long time because I want to. I don't feel a responsibility. The church didn't tell me to do it. My mom didn't tell me to do it. My professor didn't tell me to do it. No, I'm just lucky enough to be able to have my inner vision and my ability to pull things off. I'm very fortunate in that way. It's natural to me.