

Holly Near, Laura Kemp
8 pm Thursday, Oct. 25
Corvallis High School Theater
\$24.50



Will Sing for Change

Holly Near revisits the classics

Holly Near doubtless has a number of die-hard fans in the Eugene area already. Her career spans 35 years of singing, speaking and writing on behalf of progressive causes, and includes collaborations with other politically minded recording legends such as Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie and Ronnie Gilbert. But critical acclaim and a committed fan base are not what Near wants most. Where others have tired, she remains steady in her pursuit of a world free from violence and injustice. Her rich vibrato illuminates songs that not only touch upon but delve deeply into subjects that may seem terrifying but are too important to ignore. “Beat down in the market, stoned to death in the plaza,” she declares fearlessly in her uncomfortable but striking “Somebody’s Jail”:

*Raped on the hillside under the gun
from L.A. to Gaza*

*A house made of cardboard, living
close to the rail*

*Somebody’s mama, somebody’s daughter
Somebody’s jail*

Near’s latest release, *Show Up*, is as musically diverse as it is unapologetically demanding of change. From rhythm-and-blues influenced tracks to stark ballads and a few rousing toe-tappers in between, her artistic choices demonstrate her commitment not only to peace and justice, but to celebrating

life and connections between people. Covers such as Jackson Browne’s “Lives in the Balance” and Jane Siberry’s “Bound by the Beauty” blend the poetic musing of respected fellow songwriters with Near’s thoughtful compositions and loving vocal treatments.

While the album is far from experimental, *Show Up* provides a number of very catchy melodies, some exquisite singing and two particularly powerful anthems. “I Am Willing” evokes such campfire classics as “May the Circle Be Unbroken,” calling upon the universe for a push in the right direction. The traditional rendering of “Drunken Sailor” gets a redressing from Near as she unlocks and challenges the hidden meaning embedded in a tune sung by many but understood by few. “Put him in bed with the captain’s daughter,” is actually a call to beat the drunkard with a whip (the “captain’s daughter”) and almost every verse calls for brutal punishment of the poor, whisky-soaked seaman. Near sings her new version of “Drunken Sailor” over a percussive tapestry woven by Jackeline Rago, asking, “Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? Being late and being fired? First one drunk and last one hired?” She ends with words of compassion and hope for those afflicted with the disease of addiction, breaking tradition by co-opting the most traditional of melodies. **EW**

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