

FIRE WAITING FOR FUEL

Activist singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco comes to McDonald Theatre with a mission

Ani DiFranco doesn't mince words: Her current tour is called Vote Dammit! The objective is to ignite the political fires of an audience through music and community building.

"It's about participation," DiFranco tells EW. "If we sit out on election day, bad things will happen, but if everyone who could vote would vote we'd have a better country."

DiFranco adds: "I feel there's a pendulum swing back to progressive energy and thought and change. There's a fire waiting for fuel. We just need to ignite ourselves. We need to get together and we'll be powerful."

And so DiFranco provides not only tangible opportunities to get involved — you can register to vote at her shows — she offers a crucial ingredient for political and artistic combustion: resilient optimism.

"This is what gives me so much hope and puts so much life into me," DiFranco says, "when you go to a show and make that connection with everyone around you and the performer — and 'performance' isn't even the right word because music is a social act — you get that synergy of energy and purpose. You're getting right to the essence of it all."

For DiFranco, touring brings her closer to her community, and therefore to the blaze of advocacy.



ANI DIFRANCO

PHOTO BY CHARLES WALDORF

"There's a lot of passion, a lot of activism," she says of being on the road, as opposed to off, when "I find myself much more alienated and pessimistic."

Known for having a charismatic and charged stage presence, DiFranco savors the symbiosis of audience interaction. "The most powerful connections are the ones you make face to face," DiFranco says.

This kinetic attention consumes DiFranco's studio albums as much as her live performances. *Allergic to Water* (2014), her 18th studio album, explores the liminal space between brutality and beauty.

Never shying away from a challenge, on the songs of *Allergic to Water*, DiFranco revels in the contradiction of joy and sorrow entangled.

"What if the necessary thing, the life-sustaining thing is also very painful," DiFranco says, pointing toward the album title. "Guess what, it is!" Fulfillment and wonder — whether found in music, motherhood or social movement — can be simultaneously "fucking brutal," DiFranco says. "Running through that record is a lot of meditation on acceptance."

DiFranco is in her third decade of touring, performing and recording albums. In 1990, she created her own record label — and was one of the first independent musicians to do so — called Righteous Babe Records, thereby allowing herself the creative freedom to incite, ignite and make music without inhibition.

A confluence of alternative and folk rock with punk, funk and jazz influences, DiFranco's songs investigate the human experience — heartache and relationships and motherhood — as well as the pressures and effects of external forces — racism, sexism, reproductive rights, poverty, consumerism and more.

DiFranco, who received the "Women of Courage" award from the National Organization of Women and has been nominated for several Grammys, remains driven by music and community. "It's all about playing live music for people."

DiFranco's longtime bassist (and Eugene local) Todd Sickafoose and New Orleans drummer Terrence Higgins will join her on stage March 2. "I'm just fucking loving grooving with my band these days. I got a bunch of new songs I'm playing a lot on stage right now because they're really political and kind of in your face," says DiFranco, laughing. "Mama's back on her fucking horse!" ■

Rupa & The April Fishes join Ani DiFranco 8 pm Wednesday, March 2, at McDonald Theatre; \$29.50-\$37.

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