



Varied

VOICES

Introducing

Elizabeth Min, New Artistic Director

A Conversation with Holly Near

Elizabeth Min has joined Redwood Cultural Work as Artistic Director. Min comes to Redwood from her position as Executive Artistic Director of Oakland Youth Chorus, where she built one of the most innovative and diverse arts companies for young singers in the U.S. She founded the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic, and was its music director and conductor for the orchestra's first four seasons. Min is interviewed by Redwood founder, artist, board member and outgoing Artistic Director **Holly Near**.

HN: I'd like you to talk about some doors that you have passed through to get to where you are today. What are your family traditions, your root connections? What got you into music—thinking the way you think—living where you live?

EM: (Laughing) I've spent thousands of dollars in therapy on those subjects.

HN: Were you raised in California?

EM: No, I was raised in Colorado—born in Minneapolis. I was adopted—a fact I found out just a little more than a year ago—so at the moment, I am engaged in a birth parent search. I've located my birth mother and she's about to become a real person to me at any moment.



ELIZABETH MIN

Photo: Irene Young

HN: Do you know her heritage, where she comes from?

EM: She's of English, French and German descent. My father is Javanese and an Indonesian citizen. She's from the U.S. but he's never been here. They met in Europe after WWII when she worked with the Quakers and he was a student. He eventually returned to Indonesia to work in agriculture. I have one letter from her where she chronicles their relationship, describing how they were very much in love, but when she found herself pregnant in Europe in 1953—I was born in 1954—she said it was such

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Varied Voices

Redwood Cultural Work



Varied Voices has a history in the documentation of culture. *Varied Voices of Black Women* was the title of the first national tour of black women's music, organized by Roadwork, Inc., in 1978. Through this journal of art and politics, we want to follow in this tradition, bringing you the voices of women and men who are carriers of culture, toward the development of a richer, multicultural society.

The mission of Redwood Cultural Work is to produce performing arts which promote international peace and human understanding for all people by presenting artists, primarily women, who represent a wide spectrum of cultures and artistic traditions.

We carry out our mission by

- ▼ Presenting an annual season of concerts, and by recording and distributing music of significant national and international composers and performers whose work illuminates cultural and social issues of our time
- ▼ Commissioning and presenting collaborative new works involving artists of diverse cultural perspectives
- ▼ By undertaking cultural advocacy work locally and nationally

Redwood Cultural Work's programs are rooted in nearly 20 years of national leadership in the field of socially relevant and culturally diverse music. This experience reflects the profound ways that music and culture empower, change and enrich people's lives.

Volunteers: A very special heartfelt thank you to all of you who so generously give your time, energy and resources to Redwood. We couldn't do this work without you!

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a heady experience, traveling and working in different places in post-war Europe, that she just had to go home and get grounded. She couldn't deal with going to live in Indonesia right after the revolution. He really wanted to get married but she just couldn't do it. At the time, she was 24 and he was 32 and he didn't speak much English so they communicated mainly in German.

HN: *And then you were adopted by people over here who lived in Minneapolis?*

EM: No, they lived in Colorado. My adopted father was Hawaiian and Korean and my adopted mother is Caucasian. They were looking for mixed-race children to adopt.

HN: *That's a lot of new information to take in. You have to tell me how much of this you don't want printed because it's so new. It means so much to so many people.*

EM: Yes, I've thought about this and decided it's something personal that I would like to share. Not just the whole search for my own identity, which is another story for another time, but the whole mixed race thing, which for me personally is a really big issue. The more I delve into this whole adoption thing, the more I find especially people of color discovering their blended heritages. With one foot in one culture and the other in another—where do we fit? What does this mean about being an American?

HN: *Do you think there's something strange about living in America that actually makes for both confusion of identity but also an acceptance of mixed identity, as opposed to if you lived in a very identifiable culture and you were the outcast? This country is considered such a melting pot of cultures even though it is not an equitable one.*

EM: I think it's an accepted thing for people of mixed European ancestry. My whole life I've heard white people say, "Well everybody's a mixture of something." But for blended people of color, it's a matter of visibility and acceptance in the culture.

HN: *What did you think you were?*

EM: I always checked "other" on forms because nobody ever told me what I was—the shame was pretty deep. All I could really go on was how I was treated, and I knew I was treated differently than white kids, that was very clear. When I began playing the piano in public at about age 8, people started telling me that I had an Asian name, or they would say, "Are you Japanese or Chinese or what?" That was just like a piece of information to me. "Oh. I'm Asian, OK." So, I knew that I was different from kids around me, although I went to a very racially mixed school system in elementary school...very very diverse.

There were a lot of Mexican kids. And African-American kids, and Puerto Rican kids, but not any other Asians.

HN: So people probably assumed you were Mexican, except for your name?

EM: Yes. That's often been the case. Even when I lived in Mexico, until about 30 minutes into the conversation (laughing).

HN: How does that affect your music?

EM: In my work as a conductor it's been an innate thing with me—I always want to explore the putting together of various elements and seeing what new whole is created. I guess it's true that in my work as a conductor, "blending" is a major part of what I've been doing.

HN: Do you feel that because people applied an Asian stereotype to how they saw you, that stereotyping is what directed you towards classical music, the way black kids sometimes feel they get pushed into sports?

EM: No, although I remember a teacher of mine saying "since you want to be a musician it's good you're Asian—all the most famous classical musicians are either Asian or Jewish." That kind of talk went right over my head. It wasn't until much later that I even understood what she was talking about.

HN: Stereotypes add so much confusion for people, because there's often something in a stereotype one can extract pride from, right? There's absolutely no reason why a black kid can't feel proud about being a great basketball player or dancer. And there's no reason why an Asian community can't feel really proud of how many Asian musicians have surfaced.

EM: Yes, I find that in my work with Oakland Youth Chorus. I spend a lot of time with the group I direct there—Vocal Motion—they're 14 to 21 years in age, all very bright and talented, and from all different types of backgrounds—economic, social, racial. The Asian kids and the black kids really talk about this issue. We'll be riding in the van to a concert somewhere, and they get deeply into this whole discussion. It usually comes up around school—one of the Asian kids is particularly strong in math, and one of the black kids will say, "Why are Asian kids so good in math?" Another Asian will say, "I'm not, I'm being tutored in it." They get deeply involved in trying to figure out why these differences appear to be going on. They haven't come up with a solution yet, though I'm waiting. If anybody can figure it out, they can.

HN: You've worked a lot in classical music, both as a pianist and as a conductor. Was there ever a point where you questioned whether you wanted to do a different style? Has it always been classical music that you've pursued, until lately?

EM: I've always been interested in lots of different kinds of music. Growing up, I was so active playing and performing

from an early age that I really didn't have time to get deeply into other styles. I was under the influence of a very strong teacher—which I'm thankful for—but she filled all my time with the classical thing. But, I've always liked everything else, and I've certainly always wanted to play a lot of different kinds of music.

HN: Do you think that along the way you connected any kind of expression of humanitarianism to wordless music? What is your emotional connection to what you played? As you developed as a person and started to have a world view and politics, how did you connect that to being an artist, a conductor—not only in your childhood but also as an adult?

EM: Since I was a musician from such a young age, music was always an extremely emotional thing for me. It was my personal expression—where the real power of the self came from. Because of the restrained atmosphere in which I grew up, I didn't express raw out-and-out emotion in other ways. Playing the real hard-core classical repertoire when you're 10, 11 and 12 is very, very powerful. It's very emotional and taps into deep, deep feeling—the connections of the harmonies and melodies, the different styles and just the absolute power and timelessness of the music itself. It's also a very physical kind of thing. The music I've always liked best is most grounded to dance, the more physical, rather than the more cerebral, intellectual side of classical music. I would express lots of emotions, the whole range. Sometimes I would perform and people would say, "Oh, that was so beautiful," and I'd be thinking, God, that was total out-and-out anger. I was just tearing the hell out of the piano, how did they miss it?

HN: Very few people have an easy time saying that rage is beautiful. Maybe what they meant to say was, "I find rage, when it's not violent, passionate." We don't have a language for it, especially for women who let strength and power and resistance show.

EM: In music, there's so much power in silence. I found that in conducting the Women's Philharmonic. When a sixty-piece orchestra takes a full half-note rest, that can be a moment of extreme emotion and expressiveness.

HN: I love ballad singers who dare to leave space. When I listen to contemporary pop music, it's so busy. Endless. And if it's not the voice, it's the synthesizer, and if it's not the synth, it's the drum. I want to scream and say, "Stop!" So now, if you had a fantasy piece of something that you would conduct or commission, would it be connected to a spiritual or political idea? Pablo Casals seemed to make a connection between his commitment to humanitarianism and playing the cello. It is a question for some music students—"If I do non-verbal music, how can I be part of the musical expression for peace and justice?"

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Close Up with Altazor

by Helen Cohen

Altazor, the nation's only women's nueva cancion ensemble, composes and performs music based on the indigenous instruments and melodies of Chile, the Andes, Venezuela, Argentina, and the Caribbean. The members of Altazor—Dulce Arguelles, Lichi Fuentes, Jackeline Rago and Vanessa Wang—raise their voices in opposition to social injustice throughout South and Central America, clearly connecting the conditions of people of color in the United States and throughout the world.

HC: One of the things that has always been so moving to me about Altazor is the blending of your different musical and cultural influences. I'm very interested in hearing about your backgrounds—culturally, politically, socially and musically. How do those elements feed into your music and the work that you do together?

Lichi: I come from a family that is very musical. We weren't professional musicians in my family, but we always sang and played instruments. Music was the basic, the point where everyone was united. It's still like that today.

I was born in Chile and grew up in a town called San Fernando. We spent our summers in the countryside singing around a fire with friends, participating in festivals that we created with the people who were on vacation. It was sort of like the tradition of my town and the little towns around it. In Chile it happens a lot on the beach or the countryside, people who go there to spend the summer prepare activities—singing is one of the things that is very common.

HC: Folk music, mostly?

Lichi: Folk music, popular music. It depends—whoever is there sings what they want. In my family we used to sing a lot of popular music from Argentina. My sisters like samba a lot. We used to sing samba with lots of harmony because we were so many brothers and sisters. That's how I got used to doing that.

HC: Argentinean samba is different from Brazilian samba, which is what we are more familiar with, right?

Lichi: Argentinean sambas are sort of romantic songs—love songs. They talk about the countryside. The rhythm is totally different from the Brazilian samba.

HC: Did you learn to play instruments then?



Photo: Irene Young

THE MEMBERS OF ALTAZOR: JACKELINE RAGO, LICHI FUENTES, VANESSA WANG, AND DULCE ARGUELLES.

Lichi: Yes, when I was five, one of my sisters was studying guitar and I wanted to play guitar, so I started watching her. I learned the first chords just by watching her. I never really studied guitar. Later, I took some lessons. I do my best. I really like the instrument so I practice a lot. I have been playing guitar since I was five years old; I always did something musical in school. I formed a group with three girls and two boys in high school. And like San Fernando and the little towns around it, all the schools had festivals every year. So we went school to school, participating in the festivals—and we won all of them.

HC: That's great! Was the music that you played and sang then an important influence on the music you're doing with Altazor?

Lichi: Not really. I used to sing songs by the Spanish singer Rafael—and a lot of music from Spain. And then my taste changed when I discovered Juan Manuel Serrat from Spain. His music was sort of like popular music but with a different concept because it included social issues. This was when I was 11 and I started to know about Violetta Parra—she was already a popular singer, yet I wasn't familiar with her. The political situation in Chile was kind of intense, I was aware of the different political parties. I had a brother who belonged to a party of the left, so I began to identify more with the social issues they were raising. As a result, my taste in music changed a lot.

Jackie: In my case I started playing music when I was 12 years old. Like Lichi described in Chile, in Venezuela the same thing happened. Every school had what was called an *estudiantina*. An *estudiantina* is a group of students

who play folkloric instruments. From primary school on to today I've been studying the cuatro, the mandolin and percussion. When I was 12, I studied with a group with kids of all ages from 9 to 13. I played percussion and cuatro.

HC: This was a group you started?

Jackie: I started it with a friend of mine, Roberto. We grew up together from kindergarten and always played music together. He's also a professional musician now. Roberto and I worked together for a long time. We had a theater group; we wrote the pieces, we made the costumes, we performed in theaters. Only comedy; of course—we were the clowns! We did this until we went to high school. Then we went to separate high schools, but still kept playing mandolin and cuatro in the studio.

Then I graduated high school and studied at the Conservatory of Music in Caracas. I studied classical mandolin for two years. I also studied background music for theater, but I never abandoned the music, never. One of the reasons that helped me not to abandon music was that in a country like Venezuela, everywhere you go there is music. You ride public transportation and the driver has music playing full volume. So you are always singing. You walk downtown and all the stores have their own music—it's crazy. They have stereos and they put the speakers out on the streets.

HC: Is the music that you hear on the streets and buses popular, contemporary music? I'm curious—what brought you back to folk music or folk traditions?

Jackie: You know what, I never “decided” to be a musician. My family always asked me what I wanted to study, and I would look at them like they were silly. What are you asking me—music! They always supported me and gave me the instruments I needed. But they never put me in a private music class. I asked my dad, please, I want to get registered in music school, and I don't want to go to high school. And he told me I was crazy. “If you want to be a professional musician, first you go to high school, and then you study music.” So I studied music at night and attended high school during the day.

I always had that one focus of being committed to music without knowing why. Then I decided to come here and learn English and go to music school. Because in Venezuela ten years ago you could go to the conservatory, but you didn't have a major faculty to get a B.A. in music. The only place to concentrate on music was here or Europe. I don't know, maybe in Africa or other countries, too. So I decided to come here, and I went to Holy Names College to study English and then study the Koday program. I didn't like it. It wasn't what I was looking for. I always dreamed of being in a group of folk musicians. You know, first I studied folkloric music and I always played

cuatro and mandolin. Then I studied classical, and that was the first time I went away from the total folkloric thing. Because these other musicians were trained in jazz, I learned a lot from them. Playing in Altazor is the first time I got involved with political and social themes in music. I wasn't exposed to political music in the same way as Lichi because the political situation in Venezuela was different. In Venezuela, my generation was living in a free democratic political situation and not exposed to political change at that time. Venezuela has been a democracy for a long time. We don't have the same political problems; we have political problems, but not as extreme or recent, so my generation didn't get so involved politically.

This style with Altazor is good for me. What I do with Altazor is bring what I know of Venezuelan music.

Dulce: I grew up listening to Cuban music at home. As far as playing music, I started taking lessons at age 10 or 11. I studied classical guitar, and performed as a soloist and in duets. After college I explored electronic music and composition. When I moved out to the Bay Area, I came in contact with musicians who played Latin American music and music from other parts of the world. That was very exciting to me—I started to realize the power that music has to move, to teach and to make people feel good. I had been affected by other people's music and I wanted to be involved in music that carried a message.

Vanessa: It's kind of a funny question for me because I am from the United States and I was born here. My parents were born here and I don't come from a Latin background, and I'm playing Latin music. I mean people seem to have a problem associating me with being from the United States. I always get people asking the typical question, “Where are you from?” And I say, “I'm from here.” “Yeah, but really, you know.” “Yeah, I'm from here. I am really from here.” And people react with comments like, “Oh, you speak English so well?” “Well, yeah, I'm from here.” And so culturally maybe it needs a little more explanation of why I'm doing this.

I've played music ever since I was pretty young. I started playing piano when I was seven. I played classical music, popular music and all the stuff that was going on in the the late '60s and '70s. You know, everybody had their steel-stringed guitars and played Joni Mitchell songs. It wasn't until later that I got into Latin music.

I left the music program at UC Berkeley and wanted to do something less formal, not so uptight, and with more social relevance. I started playing music with a couple of friends who played Irish and English traditional music, which was fun. We didn't read music, just learned everything by ear. It was very social music, and there was always dancing. It was a very different experience for me,

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musically, to play socially instead of being in a little box where you are playing by yourself. So that was one step—going into playing traditional music.

Later, I started to take a voice class in jazz, but it didn't move me. The lyrics to the songs that we were learning didn't do anything for me. I didn't feel inspired by them or like I could identify with what they were saying. I really wanted to look for some music that I *felt* something about. That's when a friend of mine invited me to join the La Peña Community Chorus, which was my exposure to Nueva Cancion in a more tangible way than before. And so that's how I got interested. And I felt like it was music that I could feel and that had meaning for me. From there I started learning instruments from Latin America at La Peña and hanging around with people who play this kind of stuff. Along with that I was becoming more politically involved as well and getting more and more interested in things that were going on in Latin America—specifically in Chile.

HC: *How did Altazor get started as a group?*

Vanessa: It started from Lichi's workshop. Lichi had a performing Nueva Cancion ensemble at La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley. When the workshop ended, we felt we wanted to keep going, or at least some of us did. We had been doing this for a couple of years, it was nice, and we wanted to keep it going. So a small group of us stayed together to keep performing, and it evolved into this group we have now.

HC: *How does it feel to be an all-women's group doing Nueva Cancion? Is it part of your identity and sense of purpose—in terms of the music you choose to perform, or how you're perceived by other musicians?*

Lichi: It wasn't the purpose of the group to be an all-women's group at the beginning. It just happened out of this workshop. The women felt better playing together. I have played with other groups—it wasn't so much the fact that in this group we were all women—we just got along well. The group has an identity, and I think it would kill that identity if we had a male in our group. It's not that we don't play music with men. As a group we have a sound, a dynamic in the group; we have sort of come to an agreement of taste. You get used to each other. Maybe someday a guy will appear and he will fit fine. It's not like we're exclusively an all-women band. But the way I see it now, it would be out of place.

Vanessa: I think being an all-women group cuts both ways. On the one hand there are definitely gender differences in the way people work. I have worked in mixed groups. I think there is a way that we work together that has to do with who we are individually, but also it has to do with being women.

HC: *Can you give an example of that?*

Vanessa: Well, some of it has been communicated to us from the outside about the feeling that our performances have. One example was when we did a split concert with the group Illapu from Chile. People told us about how different the energy on stage was and that there was a very clear kind of gender split, they being an all-male group and we being an all-female group. There is a different kind of approach. We work collectively in the group. There isn't anybody who has to be the leader or someone saying, "I get to do all the solos." We share that kind of stuff.

HC: *Do you notice a clear division of labor or leadership?*

Vanessa: No, and also there isn't any competition. I have experience in other groups where there have been big ego problems going on or people who feel that they can't share. I'm not saying that men can't share! It's just that there is a different kind of dynamic. Definitely. Like Lichi was saying, it would change our dynamic to have men in the group.

Dulce: I didn't realize the impact we would have on audiences until we started performing in different parts of the country. People come up to us after concerts—women, men and older women, to tell us that they're moved by seeing women holding and playing instruments. I'm impressed by the amount of girls, not boys, who ask for our autographs. This indicates to me their hunger for female role models in music.

Jackie: There was just one more thing I wanted to say about the question of being a women's band: What I don't like about the identification of a women's group is that it makes it sound like we're just for women, which we aren't. We're for everybody, and it kind of makes me angry because, for example, I was in a record store the other day in the Latin American section, and our music wasn't there. I went over to the women's music section and there we were. I thought, "What is this?" It really bothered me that there was this ghettoization of music by women. Like somehow only women are going to be interested in this music or that it's music just for women. I don't know what it is!

HC: *You wouldn't find a group that was all men in the men's section, right?*

Vanessa: Right! Where's the men's music section? The whole rest of the store is the men's music section!

HC: *Or the assumption, as you just said, that you're singing just for a women's audience.*

Vanessa: That's the part I really dislike—to be pigeonholed in that way when nobody seems to ask men's groups, "Well, what does it feel like to be in an all-men's group?" It's just taken for granted, but women always get

asked that if it happens to be an all-women group. Everybody feels like they are trying to make some point. No, we're not making some point, we're just doing what we want to do.

Jackie: I think it is also very important to notice that in Latin America and I think in the United States, Europe, everywhere in the world, but especially in Latin America because that's the example and the experience I have, most of the instruments we play have been male dominated. Drums are played by men; flutes, guitars, and most of the strong lyrics are written by men. And in terms of instrumentation, men have always been on top and have always put the women down. I have received comments like, "Wow, for being a woman, you play a very good bongo!"

I started playing music when I was five years old. I didn't have a consciousness of men and women, I was a kid. I was a kid who loved music. Whether I was a man or woman, I'm this person that I am. And I chose to play the bongo. When I was just a kid, it didn't matter. I never related music with gender. I think it is a big mistake to see with that prejudice, but you cannot blame people because they are accustomed to seeing that. For example, at the beginning it was hard for me to open my legs and put the bongo between them, because it was not customary. It was very difficult. I imagined playing the cajon. It's true, there is something about being strong to play the skin of a drum. You can always play soft, but you can also play strong with female energy.

So I think people have to understand that the world is changing and women should take over a little bit more, to balance the male energy that has been dominating not just in music, but in everything we do. I think it's great that Altazor is all women and presents the message and the instrumentation for people to know that it is possible for women to do things like this.

We are in a territory in which people are more open. If we go down to, say, Venezuela, it is pretty open; in Chile it is a little more difficult to be to be an all-female group. That's what Lichi has said all the time. We are as good as the other groups which are all male. We are not competing; we just want to do a good job.

HC: *Let me just ask a fun, thought-provoking question to wrap up. If you could put yourself out there in whatever way, if you could just choose what you wanted to be and there were no obstacles in terms of money, limitations on your time, children you are raising. What would you like to be doing at this point?*

Dulce: I'd like to be able to play for the youth, to reach young people and help them become aware of more musical options than the glossy narcissistic images that society feeds them through MTV.

Jackie: This is a dream I don't think is so impossible. I think we have a good message, a good sound, and my dream is to bring this to Latin America or as far as we can.

In my country, society gives you a role. You are a woman, so you have to be married and have children. I have seen in my country and close to me in my family a lot of frustration. A lot of intelligent women who are very dominated by society.

If I could go to Latin America or my own country and show that women can have different lives. One of the things that I personally like about our concerts is that everybody participates. It's great! A friend of mine went to a concert and saw that our music moves people. At the end of the show everybody was dancing! That's the purpose of the music—if we touch your skin and make you move. ▼

Altazor's music is available on cassette and CD. Order blank is on page 23.

Helen Cohen is chair of the Board of RCW; singer and percussionist in *Vocolot*, a women's a cappella folk ensemble based in Oakland; participant in *nueva cancion* workshops at *La Peña Cultural Work* since 1985, where she first met and played music with members of Altazor; works in the field of community economic development providing technical assistance to community land trusts; and other nonprofit housing development and employment projects.



Photo: Irene Young

Elizabeth Min

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EM: Beauty has tremendous power for transformation. What I'm interested in doing now is work that really explores something about culture-building within our society. Building of culture and the idea of cultural rights for people is very all-encompassing and takes in political, educational and economic factors. It embraces those and goes beyond. It is also a place where people can choose how they are going to act, because they're working off inspiration. I'm interested in doing work that challenges us to act, to not be passive consumers of whatever pablum culture is put in front of our faces, but to build ourselves—not only things we're going to feed ourselves, but what we're going to leave. I've done a lot of work with young people, so my heart is really tuned into what they're going to be...not only what they can pick up and run with, but that there's an environment where they can be creative together.

HN: Please talk about the chorus and what you feel some of the victories of that work have been. People talk about the "lost generation," and I'm not sure I agree with that analysis, but this is definitely a very hard time to be growing up. In the work you have done with the chorus, what kinds of successes and pitfalls have you encountered?

EM: I can say some truths I've learned about working with the very next generation. The Oakland Youth Chorus is ages 14 to 21—they're next. One thing I've learned is that for the most part, this is an invisible group of people. They're seen as "dangerous" and "going through a phase." Separation and search for identity are the paramount issues they're working on. The hardest thing for them is to develop a sense of perspective, which I think you can only get with experience. It's very hard for them to see the long view. So, when doing an artistic project, for example, some of the collaborative work I've created with them involves working with other artists who are adult professionals.

HN: Is that need for immediate gratification directly connected to this being an era of high technology, or has that always been an issue for youth?

EM: I think it's specific to American culture because we're so into consumerism. We're so passive about our culture. An example of American culture is the mall. You can go to the mall, instantly be entertained, get anything you want to eat, buy anything in enormous quantities. It's such a passive way to be.

HN: How do you see the audience as not just being passive consumers? What are some of the ways people can keep a musical experience alive, so that the experience doesn't stop once we make a record and ship it out?

EM: That is my goal, to figure out that connection. I agree with you, Redwood's audience is not the typical passive

consumer at all, which makes it all the more of a challenge for me to create experiences and events that have participation. I'm very interested in participation and building together. I'm looking for ways for any work that is created and generated here to have a really long life, to go through a lot of hands and many different places and be used in a variety of ways.

HN: What is your vision for Redwood? And what will your role be in creating it?

EM: I would like to see Redwood be more of a producing entity—to put together projects where we create and generate new work from our home base and then take it out to the world. I believe Redwood is in a wonderful position as a non-profit arts company, in that there are people all over the country who are interested in the work that we are doing here. They find it meaningful and feel it speaks to changes they are working on in their own communities. They need more music that feeds them and supports the work they are doing. They need music that helps, that is courageous and speaks up, that makes a contribution to the heart and gut and soul. Getting that music to them—that's what I want to do. Also, the whole idea of doing cross-cultural cooperative work—that's really where I'm coming from, that's what I've been doing and what I want to do for a long while.

In thinking about the twentieth anniversary year, I've listened to all Redwood's records, read different articles and talked to people about the past twenty years. It's really been quite a twenty-year period, from 1972 to 1992. I graduated from high school in 1972, and here I am the Artistic Director of Redwood in 1992. Just thinking about my close circle of friends and people that I know, the transformations we've been through are amazing, from complete and total passion for movements and causes and social concerns to complete and total burnout, failure, despair, addictions, recovery, children/no children, marriages, relationships—rise and fall on the economic and career ladder, involvement in other countries, other cultures, all of that. We're talking about a really, action-packed twenty years for a lot of people in the Redwood community.

HN: Some people are still fantasizing about the '60s. (laughing) We are also walking proof about why working with children is so important. If you graduated from high school the year I started Redwood...

EM: Yes, when I was a freshman in college, you gave an anti-war concert where I went to college. I remember thinking, "wow, that's really right-on." And Jeff Langley was such a great piano player, I really clued into him. I've thought about that a lot—that was twenty years ago!

HN: And the generation you're working with at the Oakland Youth Chorus—these are the ones who will be the

directors of our non-profits, the teachers in our schools, the health care workers, the lawyers who are doing pro-bono work for poor people.

EM: And are they mad. Maybe they're even madder than we were.

HN: I think they're more angry. Or maybe mad about different things.

EM: They feel more ripped off, I think, than we did. They feel let down.

HN: It's going to be an extraordinary next twenty.

EM: Yes, I'd like the twentieth to really be something that can nurture all of us as we reflect on the last twenty and get prepared to renew ourselves for the next twenty years, because, let's face it, we need to keep going and we need to keep renewing our strength. The battle is deep and long at this point.

HN: Speaking of the twentieth anniversary year, how do you feel about the contradictions regarding corporate sponsorship in this day and age when the arts are struggling so?

EM: I think corporations should sponsor everything they possibly can and embrace a vision of cultural democracy and community participation. Culture is about the way we live, how we regard each other, our dreams and aspirations, our communication. It takes in so many vital parts of the soul of our communities. There are corporations with excellent track records in this arena, but let's face it—we need more help and as much involvement as possible.

HN: Where do you think the line should be drawn by progressives when that corporate money is attached to the corporation wanting visibility? In part I can understand the view of the corporation—they're doing some good work and they want the community to know it—after all, the community is demanding it—so corporations want to say yes, we're doing it. Then there's also the reality that they're going to sell more product by being visible in this way.

EM: We all have to realize that any dollars given to organizations are a write-off. There are advantages to companies, absolutely clear advantages to being philanthropic in the community, just in terms of their own taxes and liabilities, and their own standing in the community. With the Youth Chorus, we've always drawn the sponsor-

ship line at alcohol company manufacturers or distributors.

HN: Let's say that there is a company that wants to completely or partially subsidize a collaboration that Redwood wants to do and they're willing to sponsor Redwood to tour it all across the country. But on the program, the tickets, maybe a banner at the bottom of the stage, we advertise their participation.

EM: I'm certainly not closed to the idea. We have to seek corporate support. And guess what, there are strong progressive folks who work in corporations, too. It's not an either/or scenario. There's no doubt that in order to survive, a company like Redwood needs layers of different kinds of sponsorship—that's just a reality of American life. It's not that these sponsorships are handed to anybody on

a silver platter, you have to work hard for them. There are some places we would be willing to go and some places we wouldn't. In terms of their visibility as one of our sponsors, that kind of partnership would be carefully negotiated. Please give me that situation to figure out! Many big tours and concerts have large sponsors—"American Express Gold Card presents Paul Simon" for example. But didn't you have to have a Gold Card to get a ticket? I wouldn't be in favor of Redwood doing something like that.

HN: Actually people who didn't have Gold Cards got tickets, but the best seats in the house were reserved for people with Gold Cards. I went to the concert and

sat there crying in the dark watching and thinking how those artists get to be taken care of while they do this beautiful music. And I thought of the struggles that Inti-Illimani and I had doing our collaboration—the couches that we slept on, the buses that we traveled in, the cramped quarters, the lack of rehearsal space, the limited recording equipment, no video, and it goes on and on. I thought, yeah, we were "pure" all right. And I asked myself if I would let an American Express Gold Card banner hang on the front of our stage—back then the answer would have been "no." But I looked at the Paul Simon show and thought—this isn't fair. American Express is going to survive whether they have their banner on our stage or not. Who's not going to survive is us. Right? Arts companies are folding all around us.

Photo: Susan Freundlich



HOLLY NEAR AND ELIZABETH MIN ON THE OAKLAND STEPS OF RCW.

Continued on next page

Elizabeth Min

Continued from previous page

EM: What did you take away from the Paul Simon show, the sight of American Express? Is that your memory of it now?

HN: *No, I took away an extraordinary collaboration of cared-for musicians.*

EM: We have to get real here. Redwood has wonderful support now, *and* we need a lot more, and more different kinds of support. There are some people who are able to give organizations like Redwood lots of money and some people who can give organizations like Redwood \$10 a year. We need both. We need corporations to sponsor us. We need foundation and government support. That's the only way we're going to survive. Sales of our records and concert tickets alone cannot support our operation. If that were the case, we would either sell in the millions or the cost of each record or ticket would be so high, we couldn't possibly be in business. Instead, we have to look this in the face, realize that we are a non-profit, believe that our work is important, that it provides a vital force in our community, and make a conscious decision about going after all kinds of funding—including the corporate sector.

HN: *The reason I asked this question is that I feel I've really learned a lot about that and changed my mind a lot about it. And I wanted to hear your perspective on it because I still don't know how to articulate it as clearly as you just did.*

EM: Anybody who wants to support Redwood should step right up. You are needed, and please bring a friend. I used to say that to people with the Youth Chorus. Conductors would say to me, "They're so fabulous, I wish that I could conduct them." I said, "Come on, come to a rehearsal and conduct them. The kids need to see as many adult professional musicians who are into their art as possible. You want to work with them, come on. You're needed." Well, the same is true for Redwood. We need lots of different kinds of supporters out there. So step right up. We'll be thrilled to have you. And I mean it! ▼

Holly Near is the founder of Redwood. For over twenty years she has worked as an outspoken singer, songwriter, actor and recently, author. Holly continues to tour. Her concerts are considered both artistic achievements as well as rejuvenating community gatherings.

Remembering Peter

For the past three years, Peter Babcock was the gifted graphic artist, activist and editor who worked behind the scenes on many of the pieces you may have received in the mail from Redwood. Peter died on October 1, 1991, of AIDS. He was a treasured friend, and his passing is a tremendous loss to us.

Shortly before Peter's death, Redwood Cultural Work, OUT/LOOK and Mal Warwick and Associates joined hands to honor Peter for his Outstanding Contributions to Social Change.

We created an award to be given annually to someone who embodies the spirit of Peter's work and vision—someone who brings creativity in art and design to the service of communication and fundraising for social change.

In honor and celebration of Peter's life, we wanted to share the text of that award with you.

**For brilliance in communicating the essence of the message, in images and words;
For excellence in the field of fundraising for social change, using the tools of visual design and editorial insight; For inspirational vision in publishing and communications, launching creative new ventures that enhance social justice, community and the environment;
For energy, passion and the persistent desire to make a better world, we honor Peter for setting new standards of excellence in all these pursuits.**

Friends and colleagues who would like to remember Peter may send contributions to the BABCOCK AWARD c/o Redwood Cultural Work. ▼

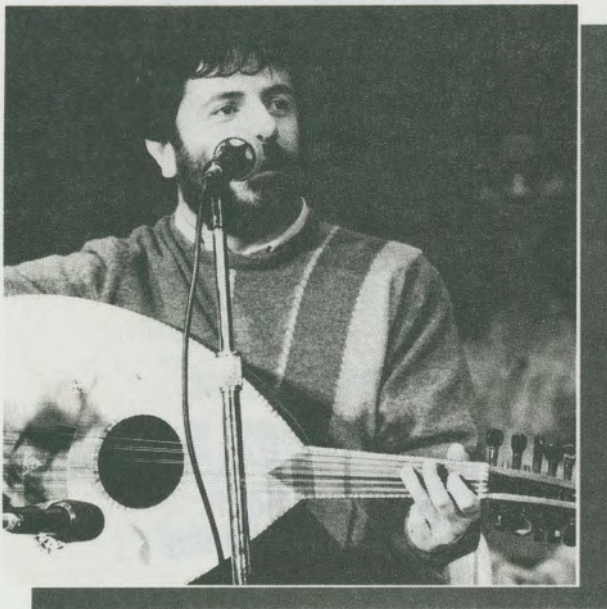


Photo: Totoy Rocamora

MARCEL KHALIFÉ

Marcel Khalifé: *Summer Night's Dream*

by Russ Jennings

Since 1972 Marcel Khalifé has been performing inspiring songs that were born in Arab culture, raised in the struggle for democracy in Lebanon and educated by the national aspirations of the Palestinians. He and his band, Al-Mayadeen, have performed all over Europe, North America and Australia as well as their native Lebanon. In 1986 they drew fifty thousand in a concert in Beirut, but most people have listened to his music on treasured, and often illegal, cassettes.

This new recording on the Redwood label, *Summer Night's Dream*, marks his first North American release since 1983. This all-instrumental opus is the culmination of several threads in Khalifé's career. The music was composed for a production by the Caracalla Dance Theatre of Beirut. This collaboration with choreographer Abdul Halim Caracalla is the first time Khalifé has been able to play a role in the Beirut arts scene since he was forced to leave his country in the early days of the civil war. Beirut's status as a major arts city, reminiscent of Paris in the 'twenties, is only now beginning to reemerge.

Last year, Khalifé returned to perform in his native town of Amsheet after being banned for 16 years. At his opening concert, which was broadcast live on television, the welcome from his old friends was tumultuous. The town's fences and buildings were covered with pictures of Khalifé, replacing the graffiti, and the people clamored his most radical songs. After Amsheet, he and Al-Mayadeen

toured Lebanon, playing in Tyre, Nabatia, Tripoli and Beirut.

Marcel Khalifé's music has always shown the influence of his years of study at the National Conservatory of Music in Beirut, where he both studied and taught. Through his twenty years of singing folk-based songs he has also produced several works for symphony orchestra. The most widely known piece of this nature is the 90-minute oratorio, *Ahmad al Arabi*, a setting of the epic poem by Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish. Al-Mayadeen has always had several western instrumentalists in the band with violins and flutes prominent in Khalifé's composing style.

For *Summer Night's Dream*, which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Khalifé calls upon a 28-piece version of Al-Mayadeen. This double-size group features some who have been part of it for many years like Micahel Keiralla and Antoin Khalifé (Khalifé's brother) on violin and Bassam Saba playing flute. But added are more violins, electric bass, saxophones, viola, cello, piano, kanoun and accordion.

The music is as full as the instrumentation. Khalifé's gift for melody is deepened by rich harmonies and culturally hybrid polyrhythms. While Khalifé does contribute some excellent oud playing, our experience is of Khalifé the composer, whose style is very romantic with a solid Middle Eastern foundation.

Two soloists stand out on the album. Antoin Deib plays a magnificent accordion on "Tango for My Lover's Eyes," a darkly passionate piece in the middle of the recording. On the final piece, "Salute," Aboud Al-Saadi is featured in a blistering fast-fingered bebop jazz guitar solo worthy of Charlie Christian. *Summer Night's Dream* was premiered in the summer of 1991 at the Picadilly Theatre in Beirut. In the program notes the piece's creators say that, "It reflects the diversities in the structure of the Shakespearean Subject, with its unbounded imagination, in a Middle Eastern vision where the climates are purely Middle Eastern." The climate on this album is very commodious, and hopefully this album will make Marcel Khalifé a regular part of our North American environment. ▼

Russ Jennings is a programmer on KPFA-FM, a freelance writer, and an independent concert producer.

Cassettes and CDs make great premiums for organizations to use for fundraising. Call (510) 835-1445 and talk with Cynthia.

WRITERS IN CONVERSATION: *Preserving Culture through Art* Annual Redwood Benefit

Oakland Museum Theatre and Restaurant
March 22

An Evening of Readings and Dialog with four of today's most provocative women writers—Sara Levi Calderón, Susan Griffin, Joy Harjo and Cherríe Moraga—moderated by Holly Near.

Sara Levi Calderón is the author of the best-selling Mexican novel, *Two Mujeres*, which is one of only three openly lesbian and Mexican works in existence. The novel explores the romance between divorced Jewish-Mexican women and the constraints of family and society. Calderón has taught Latin American Studies, studied acting and screenplay writing, and is the mother of two sons. She currently makes her home in the Bay Area.

Susan Griffin, poet, playwright and author has written, among others, the acclaimed *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* and *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature*. Her many awards include an Emmy and a MacArthur Foundation Grant for Peace and International Cooperation. She narrated, scripted and was interviewed in the film *Berkeley in the Sixties*. Her newest work, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*, will be published this year.

Joy Harjo has published four books of poetry and is at work on a fifth collection of poetic prose, *The Field of Miracles*, and an anthology of Native women's writing, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*. She is a professor in Creative Writing at the University of New Mexico. She makes her home in Albuquerque, where she plays saxophone with her band, Poetic Justice.

Cherríe Moraga, poet, essayist, playwright and political organizer, is the author of *The Shadow of A Man* and *Giving Up the Ghost*, both full-length theater works. Her most recent play, *Heroes and Saints*, a work commissioned by the Los Angeles Theater Center, is scheduled for production in San Francisco this year. Moraga is currently an instructor of Writing and Theatre in Chicano Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.



WOMEN ONSTAGE Rhodessa Jones in *Big Butt Girls, Hard Headed Women and* Marga Gomez is *Pretty, Witty and Gay*

Scottish Rite Temple
1547 Lakeside Dr. at 14th St, 1st Floor, Oakland
Friday, April 3, 8pm
Tickets: General admission \$12

Known for bringing the unmentionable, controversial and wild to center stage, actor Rhodessa Jones portrays the experiences of jailed women as harrowing, dangerous and profoundly touching. "...She transcends art to create some unforgettable moments of spiritual healing."—*Los Angeles Times*

On the eve of her appearance on a television talk show, Marga rewrites the Bible, battles extortionists, and reads from the "lost" journals of Anais Nin.



HOLLY NEAR PERFORMS A WORK IN PROGRESS

Preservation Park Theater
April 15 and 20

On the heels of her successful autobiography, *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm*, Holly and her sister/director Timothy Near, have created a musical docudrama adapted from the book for the stage. Unique in its form and content, this riveting theater piece premiered at the San Jose Repertory Theater last May. The play is scheduled to open at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles for an 8-week run in August and September 1992. This spring, in preparation for the LA production, Holly and Timothy will be doing additional work on the play, giving it time to grow and improve. Enjoy this rare opportunity to help fine-tune the show—close up! Redwood Cultural Work will present Holly doing two readings of the work in progress, with John Bucchino on piano, at the Preservation Park Theater in Oakland, April 15th and 20th.





QUEEN LATIFAH IN CONCERT
MC Dominique DiPrima
Opening Act: Petite and Elite

Calvin Simmons Theatre
10 Tenth St. at Fallon, Oakland
Saturday, April 18th, 8pm
Tickets: Reserved Seating \$22, \$19.50, \$15

Don't miss the reigning queen of rap music in her solo Oakland debut! Explosive, soulful and provocative, Queen Latifah's music carries a message of love, empowerment, and the strength of women. Integrating singing and rapping with an occasional touch of R&B, jazz, reggae, and soul, the queen is an experience not-to-be-missed.

"She put on the show of our lives and made all things right between us and around us."—Danyel Smith, *Bay Guardian*

NEW AMERICAN WORKS SERIES:
TODO MEZCLADO

Calvin Simmons Theatre
April 25

Sizzling Afro-Cuban music by Conjunto Cespedes and lilting Latin American New Song rhythms by Altazor interpret the poetry of Cuban laureate Nicolas Guillén in this world premiere of new songs commissioned by Redwood. Inspired by Guillén's dedication to *mulatez*, the concept of an interracial cultural identity, *Todo Mezclado* is a feast of color, theater, dance and exuberant music. And don't worry if you don't speak Spanish—the show is translated.

In the second year of this series, Redwood presents a concert-length collaborative multi-media performance featuring Conjunto Cespedes and Altazor. *Todo Mezclado* is a commissioned collaboration of Afro-Cuban music and dance and *Nueva Cancion Latinoamericana* (Latin American New Song) centered around musical adaptations of poetry by the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén (1902-1969).

Conjunto Cespedes is one of the leading Afro-Cuban music and dance ensembles in the western United States. Altazor is a leading American practitioner of *Nueva Cancion*, combining the folkloric traditions of Cuba, Chile and Venezuela, mixing them with modern harmonies and lyrics addressing social concerns.

Guillén's vast body of work chronicles Cuba's social, economic and political struggles. He believed that a poet must create revolution while at the same time creating art. To date, over 200 works by Guillén have been set to music in a wide range of musical styles. Guillen poetry is rooted in the structures of the son and the rumba, the two most typical idioms of popular Cuban music.

This concert brings together African and Latino traditions, both of which have made, and continue to make, distinct contributions to American culture.

REDWOOD MUSIC FESTIVAL '92

Calvin Simmons Theatre
May 29, 30

Redwood's Festival is moving to Calvin Simmons and expanding to two days! Participate in workshops and master classes during the day and hear great music in concert at night. Come be part of this celebration of community!

For many years, the Greek Theatre and Estuary Park have provided beautiful settings for potential sun worshipers and those who enjoy listening to good music while scoping the lovely view. The Redwood Music Festival is *predictably* fun as evidenced by regularly good crowds. But because of the *unpredictability* of the weather, this year we're taking the Festival indoors. The Festival's new location allows us to create a new, improved format that will provide more opportunity for audience participation.

Featured artists this year include Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert Together Again, Odetta, Guardabarranco, Toshi Reagon, Geraldine Barney, Dia ta Dia ta, and Romanovsky & Phillips.

INVEST IN A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION

Redwood Cultural Work is seeking loans (\$3,000 minimum) for two years. We offer competitive interest rates. Redwood has capitalized our projects with the loan program since 1973. Please contact Cynthia Frenz at RCW if you are interested. Call (510) 835-1445. ▼

More than Music from Holly Near

by Mollie Katzen

Several years ago, with the approach of her fortieth birthday, Holly Near began to document her life and work with a series of autobiographical projects. At the center of this multifaceted undertaking is her 290-page book, *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm* (Morrow 1990). The narrative moves back and forth in time, from rich scenes of Holly's rural childhood with her large, loving family to vignettes about her budding political awareness as a college student during the Vietnam War to stories of her journey to self-discovery. The reader is party to Holly's numerous voyages—both through the world itself and through her responses to the world. Interspersed is a selection of lyrics to some of Holly's songs which, even though familiar, take on enhanced meaning when presented as poetry within the context of her narrative. For young people of the post-Vietnam War generation, Holly's book provides a chance to get some vivid impression of that important era beyond the currently popular oversimplified '60s "nostalgia." Holly's story continues into the '70s and '80s, through the Reagan years and a dizzying period of global change. Her personal life and professional challenges and choices are just about as dizzying. She lapses a bit too far into name-dropping and self-aggrandizement, but at the same time, invokes universal themes that ring true and resonate for many of us. Even with some unevenness (and one may feel tired by Holly's pace!), *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm* makes for a real page-turner.

In her musical docudrama of the same title, adapted from the book and developed for the stage by Holly and her sister, director Timothy Near, Holly expands some of her best anecdotal material into an engaging piece of theater. The stage is clearly Holly's home. Once again, her many journeys—inner and outer—come to life, this time with Holly right in front of you. Her performance is strong and fast-paced—so typical of her style. One feels satisfied by the end—entertained and inspired. It's commonplace to view an actor portraying the life of another character on stage. But to witness a woman telling the story of her own life—the conflicts of a child artist as she discovers her voice, teenage love with all its anticipation and disappointment, falling in love with a woman, falling in love with the world—is a rare and powerful experience. The play will

open at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in August of this year.

If you can't get to LA to see the play, try her new audio autobiography, *Singer in the Storm...The Life and Music of Holly Near*. This is a 2-cassette package, containing two hours of Holly chatting and reading passages from her writing, interspersed with cuts of many songs. You might also enjoy her videotape, *Singing for Our Lives*, replete with footage of Holly in concert and cavorting in the snow, spliced with nicely shot closeups of her reading from the book. As is true for most progressive and independent artists, these works are produced with small budgets. Still, the video is quite visually compelling, and will keep even her most diehard fans rejuvenated between live concerts.

Photo: Chris Fesler



LAUGHING AT HER OWN HOMOPHOBIA IN THIS SCENE FROM THE PLAY, HOLLY TELLS STORIES OF HER EARLY DAYS IN WOMEN'S MUSIC.

Some might raise their eyebrows at the idea of a 40-year-old woman writing the story of her own life. Yet Holly's self-documentation is more a personal stock-taking than a summary of a life. It is a mid-career pause to look backward and forward at the same time: a mirrored way station. These are reflections of the early years in the life of a gifted and passionate late 20th century white North American woman striving to engage meaningfully and compassionately with a difficult world. As Holly publicly probes her memories and motivations, we are offered a privileged view into her personal struggles and triumphs, her self-love and self-hate, her doubt and her clarity. I look forward to the next installment,

maybe 20 or so years down the line. It would be good to see Holly go even deeper into her material; at first glance *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm* feels like a mere introduction—a mid-life pause. Taken in the context of history, it honors a time and movement that many of us were part of, enabling us to identify and to remember the excitement of being there. Unstated, but implied at the end of both the book and the play is the message: "To be continued..." ▼

These recent products by Holly can be ordered on page 23.

Mollie Katzen is the author/illustrator of a popular trilogy of vegetarian cookbooks: *Moosewood Cookbook*, *The Enchanted Broccoli Forest*, and *Still Life with Menu*. She lives with her husband, son and daughter near Berkeley, California, and does a variety of cultural projects involving art, writing, music and progressive politics.

Meet Theresa Harlan

An interview with Elizabeth Min

Theresa Harlan has joined Redwood's staff as Assistant to Susan Freundlich, Development Director. She is also a freelance curator of contemporary Native American art and will guest curate for the Boston Photographic Resource Center and Falkirk Cultural Center in San Rafael in the fall of this year. Harlan is the former Director of Exhibitions of the American Indian Contemporary Arts gallery in San Francisco and recently completed a fellowship at the California Arts Council, where she compiled comprehensive information about art and cultural activities taking place in California's Native American communities. Theresa is an enrolled member of the Santo Domingo Pueblo of New Mexico.

EM: *What are some of the major themes that Native American artists are dealing with now?*

TH: Right now the hot issue is the 1990 Indian Arts & Crafts law, which states that unless you meet the criteria, you cannot call or market yourself as a Native artist or you can be punished with a fine and jail. The criteria is you must be a member of a federally recognized tribe, or be listed on a state census as American Indian, or request your tribe to give you the special designation of "Indian artist."

EM: *Can you explain more about this? What do you mean?*

TH: As federally recognized Native Americans, we each have a number, a census number, that is connected to our blood quantum. We are the only race in the U.S. that has to keep track of our fractional blood quantum. This means that on paper, I am half Santa Domingo Pueblo; but I need to keep track of the fact that I am also one-quarter Laguna Pueblo and one-quarter Jemez Pueblo. If I have children, they will have to keep track—it's something that's passed down. To be a federally recognized Indian means you have to be at least one-quarter of one tribe recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Statistically it will work out that eventually there won't be any Native people left on the BIA rolls, because there's so much intermarriage. We now have inter-tribal children that are six tribes; they're full blood, yet they aren't eligible for federal recognition. It's a very bizarre practice.

EM: *This whole question of blood and blending of blood is such an American issue. To see how regulated it is for Native Americans is shocking.*

TH: Yes, it can be very unsettling. Our enrollment numbers and federal recognition can be a benefit to us on one level and be harmful on another. It all depends on the context. For instance, in the context of misconceptions and stereotypes that Native people are extinct or of the

same tribe—my enrollment number easily corrects these false ideas. In the context of individuals who fall into the trap of believing romantic stereotypes of Native Americans and search for a distant Native ancestor to provide them with



TERESA HARLAN

Native ancestry—my enrollment number easily separates me from those who want to be Native. Yet in the context of Native American history, my enrollment number is nothing more than an arm of the United States policy toward Native Americans. Many Native people have been denied federal recognition for the want of easier access to natural resources and land. Many California Native people are not federally recognized. Many Native people are not federally recognized through no fault of their own, but by the hand of the government or consequences of its policies. In this context, my enrollment number is not a badge of pride, but a painful reminder of Native people who have been denied their right to be recognized as a sovereign people and in general Native American and United States history.

EM: *How is this controversy about the Indian Arts and Crafts Law, the question of self-identity, the right of self-determination, expressed through art?*

TH: Native artists are responding to it in their work. My friend, photographer Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie, has done a whole series called "Creative Native." She's made a portrait of herself with her census number across her mouth so it looks like she's tattooed and censored. She's written text that accompanies the portrait. Hulleah poses the question—if she had lived in earlier days, would she have been like the Nighthawk or Snake Society which refused to cooperate with the government, or would she have been a mixed blood, leading the government to the full bloods? She's focused her recent work on challenging this law.

EM: *As a curator, how do you approach the artist?*

TH: I am truly in awe of artists—of their ideas, and the courage and ability to create ideas of color and vision, and that their creations will stand on their own, with or without the artist. I really believe that art, once it is created, has a life of its own. I don't try to dictate the work. I just try to gather the people together and let them speak their messages.

Continued on page 17

DIAS DE AMAR — GUARDABARRANCO CONCERT AND NEW ALBUM REVIEW

by Larry Kelp

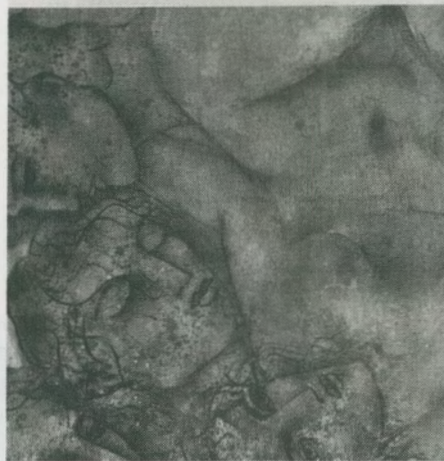
Their whole world has changed in the four years between Nicaraguan singing duo Guardabarranco's debut album, *Si Buscabas*, and their just-issued second recording, *Dias de Amar* (*Days to Love*), and accompanying U.S. tour.

The brother-sister group, Katia and Salvador Cardenal, began performing together in the cultural outpouring that followed the 1979 Sandinista revolution in their homeland. Like their Nueva Cancion counterparts in other Latin American countries, Guardabarranco used acoustic instruments and folk styles to express new views and ideas about contemporary life. But what was true four years ago has taken on a new frame of reference since the election of President Violeta Chamorro. And what has happened to Nueva Cancion, its growing use of electric instruments and Caribbean and other dance rhythms, may have had an influence on Guardabarranco, but the duo has changed little, musically, in the face of such vast political and musical upheaval.

The group, on its new album, may use darker imagery in the lyrics, but it is still delivered with a gentle intimacy unique in Nueva Cancion, indeed in most music. The songs are far from simple, but they are presented with no adornment, just Katia and Salvador's voices and Salvador's acoustic guitar for accompaniment. The lyrics may no longer have such innocent hope as during the Sandinista era, but they are still filled with hope, now hope in the face of adversity.

"*La Libertad*" ("Freedom") looks at life from behind prison bars: "Freedom—a blind child, Freedom—a crazy lover, Freedom—a swimmer in open sea, Freedom—in jail, Freedom—in my mind, Freedom—a thinker against the law." It is dedicated to Nelson Mandela. Other songs focus on love in many forms, on nature and animals. While Katia, 28, has a five-year-old daughter and has set up a musical academy for children, Salvador, 31, who writes most of the lyrics, has given up city life and now makes his home on an island on Lake Grenada. His closeness to nature and the values he sees there come through in every lyric. Newer songs emphasize the facility of nature and freedom. Yet even in their delicate melodies, the pair's performance is filled with strength and resolve to speak out for these causes.

GUARDABARRANCO



DIAS DE AMAR

Their road has become harder. In July, no longer supported by their own government, they undertook a U.S. concert tour, singing songs from both their albums. "We really wanted to come to the United States," Katia told the audience of 400 at Oakland's First Presbyterian Church on July 27, "because we know that even if the government is not with us, the people are." The trip was complicated by myriad visa headaches. To perform here and in Canada, Katia said, "We've spent half our tour in embassies."

Yet, as they harmonized so sweetly on stage, such problems melted away. Some of their songs are purely folk, others ride on catchy pop melodies worthy of the Beatles. In songs about matters of the heart it felt like eavesdropping on a confessional, it was so personal and quiet. But when Katia opened up, and seemed to take on the whole world and its attendant problems with just her voice, she sang with an urgency and intensity that is rarely captured on record. In those moments she sang without equal, a special voice speaking for all humanity. Her vocal range, her phrasing and the emotional depth of her singing seemed more than equal to handling any amount of adversity, even when set in the context of some of the most peaceful and gentle music to come out of Nueva Cancion.

The Cardenals' approach may seem to go against the mainstream, but it is clear nothing else is needed to deliver their vision. Rock star Jackson Browne was so taken with the pair that he produced their first album. The new *Dias de Amar* was recorded in Denmark, and then Browne and a few bandmates added just a touch of guitar, bass and percussion to a few of its songs. He's not alone in his

admiration of their lives and music. Country-folk singer Nanci Griffith wrote one of her most heartfelt songs, "The Wing and the Wheel," inspired by a Canadian tour she did with Guardabarranco.

Since then the duo has honed its unadorned music until every line and every vocal nuance carries weight. Children's hearts and birds serve as metaphors for their vision of a world devoid of hunger and suffering (one song on the new album even stabs directly at the American government: "And if you are going to sing/Of freedom with such pride/Then also sing that on Christmas/You sent bombs to the children of Panama") If their lyrics often reflect the reality of an imperfect world, their music at the same time offers music so beautiful that it is easy to hope that their vision is within grasp. ▼

Dias de Amar is new on the Redwood label, and is available on CD and cassette through the Redwood catalog on page 23.

Larry Kelp is the Oakland Tribune's music critic, and host of "Sing Out," the folk and political music program on Pacifica Radio Station KPFA-FM in Berkeley.

Theresa Harlan

Continued from page 15

EM: *How did you become involved with Redwood?*

TH: I consider myself a lifetime non-profit person. I believe in non-profits and find personal fulfillment in working toward a goal that contributes to people's lives. I left AICA because I wanted to further develop my non-profit management skills and also make time to write about Native American contemporary art. The growth and development of an organization can be extremely tenuous if not carefully managed. I was very attracted to Redwood because Redwood seemed so adept at handling these troublesome areas. I was especially interested in working in development, since the environment of fundraising is increasingly shifting away from large government and foundation cash awards. I was impressed with Redwood because it has such a broad and diverse base of support. I was also impressed by Redwood because it is able to carry out its vision with a positive and careful hand. I really like working with Susan and the "Redwood Gang." I am learning a lot. Susan is so eager to share with me. ▼

Redwood Cultural Work is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowable by law.

Our Wish List:

- ▼ Travel (frequent flyer) coupons for artist travel to concerts, and Redwood staff use for fundraising and conferences. These are extremely helpful to us!
- ▼ Printing donation for catalog, newsletter and stationery
- ▼ Intern/Volunteer to work on Redwood Festival-Spring '92
- ▼ Copy machine
- ▼ Computer chairs and desk chairs
- ▼ An auto-reverse tape player to hook up to the phone system, so callers will hear Redwood music
- ▼ Videotape player (VHS)
- ▼ A video camera and playback monitor

Donations of goods and services to Redwood Cultural Work are tax-deductible at their current market value.

Notes from an Artist's Journal—Holly Near

I receive countless letters bemoaning the fact that I haven't had the success I deserve, that I have not gotten famous enough: "Why don't they play you on the radio?...Why aren't you on the major night-time talk shows?" Makes me smile. I love my audience, keeping my best interests (and theirs) at heart.

However, there is a danger in believing that mainstream success is an appropriate barometer. I search for the balance between achieving mainstream visibility (i.e., wanting my music to be accessible to anyone who might enjoy it, need it) and maintaining a critical analysis of the failures of popular media. I do not want to fall prey to their agenda of bigger is better. My fans and I see that the dominant music industry is culturally and ideologically narrow, economically motivated, often socially insensitive, and offensive. We perceive that the industry lacks vision and leadership, and has created a void. Yet popular media reaches the largest number of people. This is disturbing, given the power and influence of music in our lives.

I have written songs, with no hope of them being heard, and years later I find that people who were detained in a Latin American prison heard one of my songs, sung in a whisper by a fellow prisoner who had learned it from a solidarity worker. And what of the women who have heard lesbian love songs around a campfire after the potential critics have turned in, sung by one brave camp counselor who knows she is not alone...and once again, lives and souls are reassured. What if I had decided not to write the song because it would not get major radio play?

That solidarity worker, that lesbian camp counselor...they are our radio. They and you have been my radio and the radio for other progressive artists. You have been our billboards when you teach one of our songs to your students at school. You have been our TV specials when you include one of our songs in your Seder, church service, wedding, funeral or birth ceremonies. You have hosted our appearances on late-night TV when you sing our songs as lullabies to your children, when you play our records while you make love to your beloved. And you put us on the charts when you buy our tapes and CDs, videos and books, when you go to small art theaters to see our films, when you sit in living rooms and hear our poetry, when you watch us dance on floors dangerously splintered, and when you support independent radio and television stations.

For decades people have counted on the radio as a link to the world. They have not always, if ever, gotten the whole picture through mainstream programming. This is tragic and frightening. Those who search can find alterna-



Photo by Chris Fester

MISSING HER FRIEND AND MOTHER, ANN, HOLLY SINGS "ICICLE BLUE."

tives: some jazz, some classical, some folk, some Nueva Cancion, some world music. But having the time and the resources to look are hard to come by. Those of us who have looked and found can pass this music on, and one by one our discoveries become widespread.

The fact that independent culture has survived and influenced the lives of millions of people must not be forgotten in the face of the standards set by commercial institutions. Just as we mustn't judge every political gathering by comparing it to a million gathered in Washington or in Central Park, we must not fall prey to thinking that if an artist does not play stadiums or sell over a million CDs, they have failed. Precious and unique communication takes place in small arenas. We lose an essential part of ourselves if we let someone else decide what is important.

It is debilitating to think that the world is changed by large numbers of people. I believe a relatively small group of people can effect monumental change and not even know what they have done until quite some time later. True, large numbers of people give an idea validity...but large numbers of people may not have been the first to put it forth. At a sporting event, look how few people start "the wave" until finally most participate. If we fail to believe this, and then fail to remember it when the going is tough, we miss a political and creative opportunity in our lives.

Of course I want to have access to mainstream television (with millions of people watching) for political reasons, but also for artistic ones. It would be fun! How exciting it was to hear Sweet Honey in the Rock sing, to hear Linda Tillery and Rhiannon sing with Bobby McFerrin, to see Vickie Randle play congas and sing with Kenny Loggins—all on "The Arsenio Hall Show." And I felt so proud of Martina Navratilova when she spoke so articulately on "Donahue," and how great to hear TV stars Sheila Kuehl and Dick Sargeant come out on "Geraldo."

Continued ►

REDWOOD ARTISTS ON THE ROAD

ALTAZOR

| | | |
|-------|-------------|----|
| 4/25 | Oakland | CA |
| 5/2* | Berkeley | CA |
| 5/24 | Albuquerque | NM |
| 5/1 | Saratoga | CA |
| 8/20* | Medford | OR |

FERRON

| | | |
|---------|---------------|-----------|
| 3/16 | Vancouver | BC, CAN |
| 3/19-21 | San Francisco | CA |
| 3/22 | Santa Cruz | CA |
| 3/27 | Santa Monica | CA |
| 3/28 | San Diego | CA |
| 3/31 | Davis | CA |
| 4/29 | Lethbridge | ALB, CAN |
| 4/30 | Edmonton | ALB, CAN |
| 5/1 | Saskatoon | SASK, CAN |
| 5/2 | Winnipeg | MANT, CAN |
| 5/3 | Minneapolis | MN |
| 5/5 | Waterloo | ONT, CAN |
| 5/6 | London | ONT, CAN |
| 5/7 | Hamilton | ONT, CAN |
| 5/8 | Kingston | ONT, CAN |
| 5/9 | Peterborough | ONT, CAN |
| 5/10 | Ottawa | ONT, CAN |
| 5/12 | Montreal | CAN |
| 5/14 | Peterborough | NH |
| 5/15 | Portsmouth | NH |
| 5/16 | Westboro | WA |

Holly Near

Continued from previous page

These are great moments, and I celebrate them. But they aren't the only moments.

I read your letters. Do not let our invisibility in the mainstream diminish what you mean to progressive and independent artists. It immobilizes the creative spirit to wallow in a mood of defeat. Of course it feels different than 20 years ago. The conditions are different. But the music is still here. It is a disservice to our humanity to be controlled by hopelessness. Like Toshi Reagon singing Bernice's song, "you hold your breath for change to come, we're gone have to carry you out"!* It will be awhile before peace songs and lesbian love songs are commonplace on Top 40 stations. In the meanwhile, remember you are our radio. We need you more than ever before, and I venture to say, you need us—for what people have ever survived a nightmare without music? ▼

* "How Long" by Bernice Johnson Reagon

For a complete Redwood catalog, write to us at P.O. Box 10408, Oakland, CA 94610.

| | | |
|------|----------|----------|
| 6/20 | Toronto | ONT, CAN |
| 6/21 | Oak Park | IL |
| 8/16 | Haines | AK |

RONNIE GILBERT

| | | |
|----------|-----------|----|
| 4/3-5/17 | Milwaukee | WI |
|----------|-----------|----|

INTI-ILLIMANI

| | | |
|-------------|-----------------|----|
| 3/24 | West Lafayette | IN |
| 3/26-27* | Chicago | IL |
| 3/28-29,30* | | TX |
| 4/1 | Scottsdale | AZ |
| 4/3 | Hanover | NH |
| 4/4 | New York | NY |
| 4/5 | Philadelphia | PA |
| 4/8 | Eugene | OR |
| 4/10 | Santa Barbara | CA |
| 4/11 | Claremont | CA |
| 4/12 | North Hollywood | CA |
| 4/13 | Davis | CA |
| 4/15 | Berkeley | CA |
| 4/16 | Berkeley | CA |

JUDY SMALL

| | | |
|------|----------|-----------|
| 3/15 | Winnipeg | MANT, CAN |
| 3/18 | Regina | SASK, CAN |
| 3/20 | Calgary | ALB, CAN |
| 3/22 | Berkeley | CA |

HOLLY NEAR

| | | |
|-----------|---------------|----------|
| 3/15 | Grand Rapids | MI |
| 3/19 | Sarasota | FL |
| 3/20 | Washington | DC |
| 3/21 | Raleigh | NC |
| 3/22 | Oakland | CA |
| 3/26 | Spring Valley | NY |
| 3/27 | Nashua | NH |
| 3/28 | Cambridge | MA |
| 3/29-30 | Durham | NH |
| 4/1 | Toronto | ONT, CAN |
| 4/2 | Woodstock | NY |
| 4/3 | Albany | NY |
| 4/4 | Lewisburg | PA |
| 4/7-8 | Seattle | WA |
| 4/15 & 20 | Oakland | CA |
| 4/21 | Arcata | CA |
| 4/22 | Santa Rosa | CA |
| 4/24 | Kingston | RI |
| 6/6 | Elmer | NJ |
| 6/7 | Spring Valley | NY |
| 6/14 | Saratoga | CA |
| 8/2-9/27 | Los Angeles | CA |

*indicates tentative dates

For more information call (510) 835-1445.

Chicken Made of Rags

An Interview with Greg Landau, producer of Redwood's first children's release, *The Story of the Chicken Made of Rags*

by Karen Hester

KH: How did you get interested in recording *Chicken Made of Rags*?

GL: The story begins many years ago. My mother had an uncle who was born in Santiago, Cuba. He used to tell her stories to put her to sleep. He told her this story about *The Chicken Made of Rags* (*Chicken*). So this story got recycled and told to my sister and myself when we were kids. In the early '70s, my mother, Nina Serrano, with Judy Binder, wrote a play called *The Chicken Made of Rags*, which played all around the Bay Area, and in many Bay Area schools. When I returned to the Bay Area, after living for many years in Nicaragua and working with Soul Vibrations, I talked to Nina about reviving *Chicken* and recording it because Soul Vibes was going to be in the United States and they were interested in doing it. I had also talked to other local musicians who were very excited about recording it.

So my idea was to use *Chicken* as a way of creating a multi-cultural narrative that talked about the way people live in the United States, about the different kinds of ethnic and cultural identities, different kinds of sounds and what they mean, the different kinds of work people do. I looked for actors who spoke in English with different kinds of accents. In the musical arrangements we also tried to reflect a whole different range of styles, from country music, rock'n'roll, to Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Cuban, rap, jazz, blues, cumbia—all different kinds of music. We wanted to arrange it in a way to make a children's record that wouldn't talk down to children, but would try to be something they would be interested in, something of quality, something very creative, that would inspire children to look into other cultures and try to understand the variety of cultures surrounding them.



THE "CHICKEN" FAMILY, FROM L. TO R.—
CAMILO LANDAU, PHIL SERRANO, NINA SERRANO, GREG
LANDAU, VALERIE LANDAU.

We asked the actors to use natural voices rather than fake cartoony voices, maintaining their different accents, typical regional and ethnic accents. In this way, we tried to enrich the child's listening experience. We also used a story that children could identify with, about something that's going to help them in their life. It's a story about how you get tricked all the time and you can't always trust powerful, established authority figures, so you have to question—you have to be careful.

KH: This was really a family affair. You had your mom, your uncle, sister and nephew all working on it. How did you all work together?

GL: Well, basically in a low-budget operation, you have to look at who is going to work for cheap or for free, and the first place to start is with your family, because they can't say no. That wasn't the only reason—they are all very talented people. It worked out very well because the project was close to all of us. I had the momentum of producing the Soul Vibrations record and working with Soul Vibes, and that they were there, so it gave us the momentum to carry out this recording, too, which meant hours and weeks in the studio, editing and recording, mixing, writing arrangements, fifteen singers and musicians, chord charts.

KH: You're also a videographer and a parent and uncle. You know the power of TV to captivate kids and also to anesthetize their imaginations. How do we get kids to turn off the TV and listen to music instead?

GL: I think a cassette is something that will help children a lot in developing their creativity and imagination. The problem with TV, because it's sound and image, is it doesn't leave anything to the children's imagination. They hear a voice and they see who's saying it. It's sort of



OUR FIRST CHILDREN'S RELEASE—ON CASSETTE FROM REDWOOD.

drawing the map and pictures for them right there and not allowing them to develop their images and apply them to their own experience. With a recording, the good thing is that children hear a voice and picture in their own minds who that person is or what they might look like. They develop the whole stage and scenery and action in their heads if you can give them the pieces to put together. Even the sounds, too—you don't see the musicians, so you just imagine these birds, singing and playing. I'm very much in favor of radio and radio drama because I think it helps kids to develop their creativity and imagination in ways that TV doesn't.

KH: *I have a 7-year-old friend Sabrina who loves this cassette. Have you had much experience seeing how kids are reacting to it?*

GL: Yeah, I've given out copies to different kids and watched them listen to it. We listen to their critiques.

One of the characters that was kind of interesting was the goose. The goose picks up aluminum cans and bottles on the street. And some kids saw the goose as the garbage collector that would push a broom like a street cleaner—some kids saw the goose as a homeless person walking around with a shopping cart picking up cans and bottles. It was interesting because depending on where kids live and what they see, they would interpret the characters in different ways. Take the swan that dances in the park. Some of them saw her as the elegant ballerina and some saw her as a person who dances in the park,

who is really struggling for a living. At this particular moment in American history there are a lot of ways to interpret what all these birds do out on the street and why they're so eager to go to the hotel for a grand banquet.

KH: *Because they're homeless and need to eat something?*

GL: Some kids have seen that. They see it in their own lives and they understood clearly what's going on. It wasn't what was intended by the authors, but as times change, people get more and more like these birds, out hustling on the street. People will go to great lengths to have a nice dinner.

KH: *Let's talk about the educational market and what your and your mom's and sister's hopes are for getting Chicken into the classroom.*

GL: One thing we want to do is develop a workbook to go along with the cassette to help teachers use it as an educational tool. The workbook would explain some of the things that are going on in terms of the music, the narrative, the story line that could help the teacher to make certain points, to teach certain lessons, using *Chicken* as a form of entertainment. It would be a tool to teach about music, theater, and cooperation. There are a lot of lessons that could be drawn from this story. ▼

The Story of the Chicken Made of Rags is available on cassette, and can be ordered on page 23.

Karen Hester is the Publicity Director of Redwood Cultural Work.

Greg Landau is a musician, record and video producer and Ph.D candidate in Communications. He lived in Nicaragua and worked with Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy and Mancotal for nine years and has worked with Soul Vibrations since 1987.

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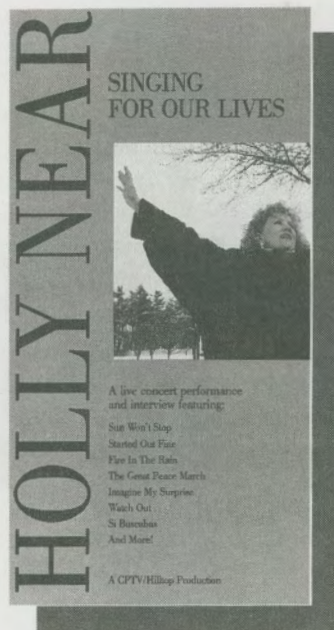
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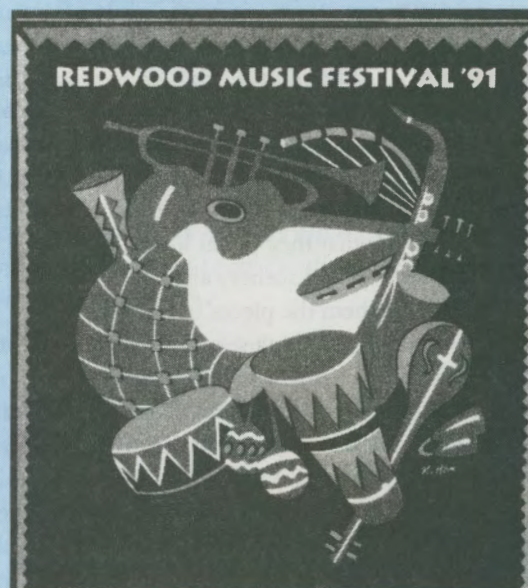
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All memberships are tax-deductible less the value of the free items.



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Festival T-Shirts

We have beautiful commemorative t-shirts from our 1991 Festival! The shirts are designed by Bay Area artist Nancy Hom. The design represents music of peace and hope from Redwood artists the world over. The 3-color design (teal, red and white) on a black t-shirt is a 100% Beefy-T in a roomy size XL. Available from Redwood for \$15. See the order form to order. ▼



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 - DIAS DE AMAR, Guardabarranco, Cass. \$9.98
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Send To



Redwood Cultural Work, P.O. Box 10408, Oakland, CA 94610 or call 1-800-888-7664.

To Our Special Friends:

Last fall Redwood was awarded a California Arts Council Challenge grant of \$25,000! This is our first grant of this kind and reflects the opinion of the Council that our work is of the highest artistic quality and significance. This kind of grant usually goes to well-established arts companies who have long received the support of the state.

In order to receive the \$25,000, we must raise \$50,000 over and above what we raised last year.

We are so happy with the response we have received so far. We send our love and heartfelt thanks to all of our friends who have contributed to our Challenge Campaign. We are now more than half way toward reaching our goal, but we still need more contributions to make the necessary match. We are asking you to consider joining our Challenge Campaign, or to make a second gift if you've already joined. Help us with this special campaign now—so we can show the state of California how important Redwood is to its members and friends. Just check the appropriate box on the order form inside. Thanks!

Inspired by a weekend reading of *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm*, Rain Burns was moved to lend us a super Macintosh. Thank you Rain, computer life at Redwood will never be the same.

Many individuals have made contributions, large and small to Redwood's work. We are very appreciative of each gift. We'd like to especially thank—Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Marion Gibson, Maya Miller, Jo-Lynne Worley, Jean Sutherland, Bette Shulman and Holly Near.

And for your generous support of our work, special thanks to the City of Oakland-Oakland Redevelopment Agency, California Arts Council, Rockefeller Foundation, Alameda County Art Commission, San Francisco Foundation, Zellerbach Foundation and the Columbia Foundation ▼



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