

Sunday Reception Welcomes N.E. Folk Music Archives

At Cotuit Center

THE MASHPEE ENTERPRISE 3-11-11

by MARILYN J. ROWLAND

It was at freshman orientation week at Boston University in 1958. A handful of freshmen rebelled against wearing the obligatory freshman beanie.

"I didn't come to art school to wear a beanie," said Joan Baez, already busking in Boston and Cambridge, a rising presence on the local folk music scene. Betsy Siggins was of the same mind, and the two nonconformists, both enrolled in the BU theater program, became roommates, and remain friends.

Ms. Siggins, now executive director of the New England Folk Music Archives, will be at the Cotuit Center for the Arts on Sunday afternoon to share stories about Joan Baez, whom she has great respect for, not only as a folksinger, but also as someone who stood up for what she believed in, mingling gorgeous old English ballads with strong political stands on civil rights and the peace movement, and someone with whom she shared many laughs. Ms. Siggins has an abundance of stories about the 1960s folk music scene and the folk music archives. Photographs, posters, and print memorabilia will be on display in the center's new upper gallery, and folk musicians Kris Delmhorst, Meg Hutchinson, and The Pines will entertain. The gallery exhibit may be viewed through March 28.

While Joan Baez did not last long at BU—she dropped out after six weeks—she made an indelible impact on folk music, and is an example of the power of the individual to influence history. It was Baez, then 17, who first sang folk music at Club 47, at 47 Mt. Auburn Street in Cambridge. Originally a jazz coffeehouse, the club soon became the place for folk music, a "magic place," said Ms. Siggins, that knew no boundaries. "Kids from Harvard and kids from Somerville mingled, drawn by their love of the music." It was the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and the anti-war movement, and political protest became an element of the folk music scene.

Regulars included Bob Dylan (though he never had his own billing at the club—he sang with Baez and between the sets of other performers), Tom Rush, Mimi and Richard Farina, Bill Staines, Bonnie Raitt, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, the Charles River Valley Boys and many more, including African-American musicians from the South, such as John Lee Hooker, Buddy Guy, B.B. King, Howling Wolf, the Staple Singers, Muddy Waters, and Mississippi John Hurt; country/old-time/bluegrass singers, like Bill Monroe, Doc Watson, and David Grisman; and singer-songwriters from the emerging folk-rock era.

"The list is long," said Ms. Siggins, who was a founding member of Club 47 and booked talent for the club, playing a key role in the club and in the growth of folk music from 1958. She married Bob Siggins (her "favorite ex-husband") from the Charles River Valley Boys, and sang occasionally with the group, but did not become a performer herself. Her strength was in supporting the music and

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she has a home (she also lives in Cambridge). As a child in Cotuit, she used to listen to country music stations from Wheeling, West Virginia, late at night.

"These were two very strong musical influences in my life that have never dwindled," she said.

By 1963, Club 47 was forced to move (the landlady did not like all of the hippies hanging around); it found a new location on Palmer Street and continued through 1968, when, for lack of \$5,000, Ms. Siggins said, it closed.

It was not long, however, before it reopened, eventually changing its name to Club Passim, while retaining its reputation as the premiere spot to perform. Ms. Siggins was the executive director of Club Passim from 1997 until a couple of years ago, when she founded the folk music archives. Its mission is to preserve, promote, and document the "ongoing cultural legacy of folk music and its connections to New England through education, collaboration and entertainment."

Its collections include photographs, recordings, and memorabilia from Club 47, the Cambridge folk music community, as well as the Newport Folk Festival, and the Old Vienna Kaffeehaus. "For-

ever Young: Bringing the Legacy to Life" features the works of photographic artists of the folk scene, including Dick Waterman's pictures of blues musicians, Boston's longtime editorial and arts photographer Don West's images, Bob Morey's rare work from 1967, and John Byrne Cooke's dramatic photographs of 1960s musical luminaries, from Bob Dylan to Mississippi John Hurt.

Ms. Siggins is the subject of a new documentary by Todd Kwait ("Chasin' Gus' Ghost") on the Cambridge scene and Club 47 from the 1950s to the present.

David Kuehn, executive director of the Cotuit Center for the arts, said he first met Ms. Siggins shortly after coming to the center. He talked with her about the space available there to display art, including the space on the second level.

"I'm incredibly proud to inaugurate our new gallery space with the archives," he said, "not only because they are a fascinating documentation of one of the most powerful and meaningful musical movements in history, but also because Betsy is a local Cotuit resident who is an active supporter and participant of the center. Sunday's event, including a live oral history by Betsy herself, a

concert including the Pines, Meg Hutchinson and Kris Delmhorst, and a reception to honor the archives themselves is one of those rare events any fan of folk music will want to experience."

Sunday's activities start at 1 PM when the doors open for attendees to view the exhibit. The Oral History with Betsy Siggins is from 1:30 to 2:30 PM. She will be interviewed by Brian Quinn of WUMB.

Doors open for the concert at 2:30 PM, which begins at 3 PM. The Pines, a duo who blend indie-rock, folk, and blues, sing from 3 to 3:25 PM. They are followed by Meg Hutchinson from 3:30 to 3:55. Ms. Hutchinson is a lyric-based, contemporary acoustic songwriter.

Kris Delmhorst is the headliner and will sing from 4:10 to 5:20 PM. A New England singer-songwriter whose melodies have roots in country, indie-rock and folk, her music has been described as "adventurous, elegant, lucid, and haunting."

A reception from 5:30 to 6:30 follows the concert.

Tickets for the concert are \$20 and may be purchased at www.artsonthecape.org or at the door. For more information, visit www.artsonthecape.org or call 508-428-0669.

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