



Thank You Faith Petric

Wandering musicians tend to have friends in the biz whom we consider to be very close and dear, though we may not see them for months on end. San Francisco's Faith Petric was such a friend to my music partner Lou and me, and more than just a friend; she was an inspiration to us in her life and in her music. She died in October of this year at age 98.

As recently as January of this year (2013), she joined us on stage at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley and flabbergasted us all over again, at age 97, with her hilarious but heartfelt rendition of one of our more difficult songs as we howled with laughter while accompanying her amazing vocal delivery.

Faith was known as the "Fort Knox of Folk Music" because of her enormous repertoire of folk and folk-like songs. She had a singing style that was loved by audiences all over the world, and deeply appreciated by songwriters like us, because she remained faithful to the melody and lyrics but added just enough interpretation to give extra life to songs.

As she sang, she paid attention to each word and phrase carefully, and delivered them with crystal clarity but seemingly effortless natural phrasing. As a singer myself (though some would argue about that), I know this isn't easy. Sometimes, in only a mildly distracting environment, I can sing half a verse of a song — even one of my own — without listening to it at all. At times, I've even forgotten which verse I just sang, I am very troubled to admit. I doubt this ever happened to Faith Petric, who made every line come alive almost

as though it were being improvised on the spot.

Some memories: As with her singing, she was captivating to talk with, for much the same reason: she was a passionate listener. We found this to be true the times we spent with her, going all the way back to the 1988 Old Songs Festival near Albany, where we met Faith. I remember she was sitting down behind the old trailer used as a sort of green room, tuning her guitar. Someone introduced us, we exchanged a few pleasantries, and she looked up at me and said, "Your not as weird as people say you are." Well, I don't know about that, but the three of us had a good laugh, and began what was to be a twenty five year friendship.

The very next year (1989), **Sing Out!** magazine had its board of directors meeting in Madison, and Faith, who wrote a column for the magazine for decades and was on the board for many years, stayed for those few days with Lou and her husband Mark. Also on the board was Andy Spence, director and founder of the Old Songs Festival. That weekend Andy, having heard somewhere of my former life as an illustrator, hired Lou and me to paint a mural on the audience-side of the green-room trailer for the 10 year anniversary of the Festival the very next year (1990).

Faith immediately volunteered to help. So the next summer, Faith, Andy's daughter Hannah, and the great Michael Cooney joined us for the week before the fest as we painted our fool heads off. If we hadn't been close to Faith before this week, we sure would have been by the time the mural was done. She worked tirelessly and with her customary good cheer. The only time any gruffness surfaced was if someone suggested that at age 75 she might want to take a rest break. She was proud of being old but fought until the end against the idea of going easy on herself.

We had great long intimate conversations with Faith at this and other meetings with her, and she was always, without fail, full of spirited opinions but also full of honest curiosity about the opinions and situations of others. Above all else, Faith was driven by the desire to spread the word about the plights of the downtrodden and unfortunate, and wrote, marched, organized, and sang exhaustively on their behalf.

Here are a few tidbits about Faith: Born in a log cabin in Idaho in 1915. Remembers singing in her minister-father's church at age 3. Worked to pay her own tuition to Whitman College where she graduated in 1937. Sang protest songs during the Spanish Civil War. Was a Wobbly and lifelong progressive. Was a friend of Leadbelly and his wife Martha. Fleeted down the Amazon. Was a single working mother. Visited Russia as member of a peace delegation.

Was a shipfitter in New York during World War II. Hosted Friday Night San Francisco Folk Club jams for decades, starting in 1966. Sang on the streets of San Francisco with the Raging Grannies until into her nineties. Booked her own Australian tour in 1988, at the age of 83. Toured the Pacific Northwest and performed with the New Old Time Chautauqua hosted by the Flying Karazov Brothers as recently as 2008.

"This is the woman who in Australia, wowed the crowd with her long grey braids and folksy look while singing, 'If you haven't got a penis, then you can not be a priest.' Talk about a crowd pleaser!" — *Cathy Fink / Marcy Marxer*

We will dearly miss Faith Petric and will think of her whenever tempted to take a rest break from our passions.

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