



Folk singer Joan Baez returns to Nashville Thursday for the LIVE! at Cheekwood concert series. PHOTO BY DANA TYNAN

JOAN BAEZ

STAYS TRUE TO THE MUSIC

By Peter Cooper THE TENNESSEAN

Joan Baez is comfortable these days in Nashville. On Thursday, she'll play Cheekwood Botanical Gardens, and there'll be pretty flowers and warm applause and smiles all around.

Quite different, then, from Baez's first trip to town in the fall of 1968, when her staunch anti-war stance and outspoken civil rights work made her the sweetest-singing sore thumb in area code 615.

"The musicians and I were tiptoeing around each other," said Baez, whose most recent album, the Steve Earle-produced *Day After Tomorrow*, was nominated for a Grammy. "I don't think I was as nervous as they were. They were afraid I was going to do whatever pinkos do. But the first dinner we had, (renowned Nashville guitarist) Grady Martin told a very funny, very dirty joke, and I split a gut laughing. That was the trial, and after that, I was OK."

In the studio, the folk queen sang songs by Bob Dylan, Gram Parsons and Utah Phillips, while automobiles with bumper stickers nodding to famous civil rights opponent George Wallace sat idle in the parking lot. And Baez soon found musical empathy had nothing to do with political leanings.

"She just wanted us to do our thing behind her, and at the time it was such a joy to back up somebody that had chops like she did," said fiddler Buddy Spicher, talking to steel guitarist and historian Pete Finney for a book

project Finney is working on. "When the singer's on you're going to play your best, and that was the feeling with her."

In other words, hearty laughter or no, things would not have gone well if Baez's voice had not rung true. Plus, Johnny Cash's support of and appreciation for Bob Dylan had helped ease Music City's suspicion of folkies, and Earl Scruggs and Marijohn Wilkin were similarly supportive of Baez. On 1971's *Blessed Are* album, Baez sang the self-

>> **BAEZ, 6D**

IF YOU GO

What: Joan Baez in concert, LIVE! at Cheekwood

Where: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art (1200 Forrest Park Drive, 356-8000)

When: 8 p.m. Thursday

Future shows: Indigo Girls, Aug. 6; John Hiatt, Sept. 30, Del McCoury, Oct. 14

Tickets: \$40, \$125 VIP

Info: www.liveatcheekwood.com

JOAN BAEZ

STILL BELIEVES IN MUSIC

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penned "Outside The Nashville City Limits" about time spent at Wilkin's house, and Scruggs' presence at folk festivals meant she was familiar with him for years before ever setting foot in Nashville.

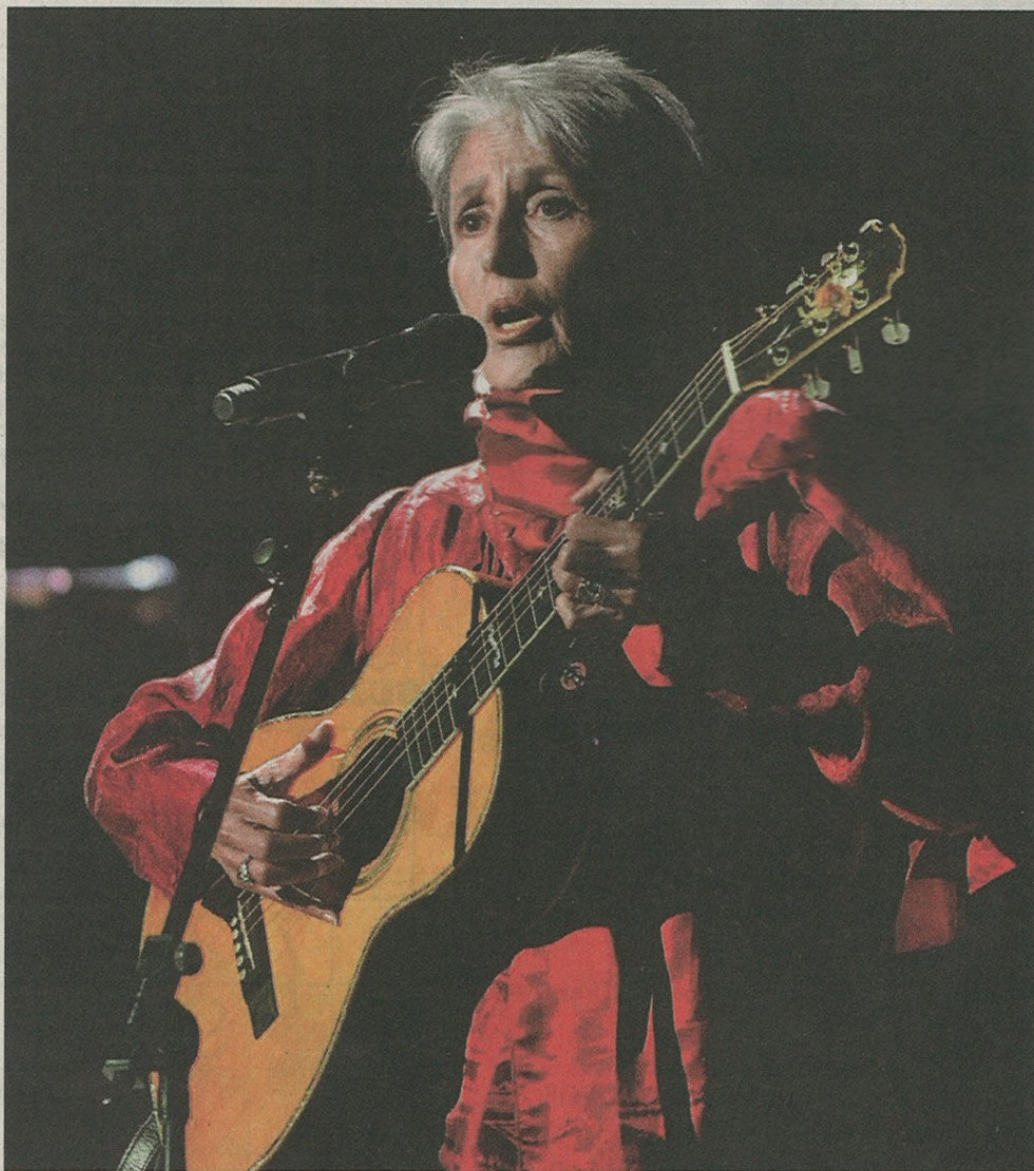
"Earl was before everything," she said. "I had a crush on him and his playing. I'd trod around after him to watch him play 'Wildwood Flower' in that old, quiet, southern style. He was just sweet. He'd start pickin' when I'd come around, and I loved his whole style."

'Music is a different thing ...'

In those days, Baez's own style was far more frenetic than Scruggs'. She kept a full load of tour dates, and also managed to march at Martin Luther King Jr.'s side and to appear at dozens of war protests and non-violence conferences. She logged more time in jail than in recording studios, as was depicted in the recent PBS documentary, *Joan Baez: How Sweet the Sound*.

"Watching that footage now, it exhausts me," she said. "I don't regret any of it, but I don't know how I did it."

Baez's Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (which she received in 2007) is testament to the impact she made behind microphones, and to the then close, now largely dissolved ties between popular music and social



Joan Baez performed during the 2008 Americana Music Honors & Awards at the Ryman Auditorium. SHELLEY MAYS / FILE / THE TENNESSEAN

change.

"I was talking to my ex-husband David (Harris) the other day, and he said there was that 10-year chunk that was like nothing had happened before, and nothing since," Baez said. "It was a perfect storm of the politics and the music and civil rights and Vietnam. And the talent of the musicians.

I don't know exactly how, or when, it stopped, but it stopped. How do you recreate that inspiration? I don't know the answer to that.

"My son is 40, and his daughter is 6," she continued. "Music is a different thing for her than it was for us. My son and his wife are trying to rationalize that

Hannah Montana is OK, and I say, 'That makes me want to throw up.' But maybe there's some hope: She sang (Bob Dylan's) 'Farewell Angelina' with me at their school fundraiser, and the kids liked that one just fine."

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