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Bonnie Koloc

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Presents

Bonnie Koloc

and special guest
Howard Levy

Saturday, May 5, 2001
8:00 pm

2000/2001 Season sponsored in part by a grant from the:
Bonnie Koloc
The Queen of the Chicago Folk Scene!

It’s been said that together with Steve Goodman and John Prine, Bonnie made up the trinity of the Chicago Folk Scene. Not much has really been written about her, and today, she is sometimes forgotten. Perhaps that is the way she wants it to be.

Bonnie was born in Iowa. She was the first in her family to ever go to college, attending a teacher’s college, The University of Northern Iowa. Bonnie grew up in Waterloo, Iowa, her father worked at the John Deere Factory. They lived in a “cement block house” As Bonnie put it:

I guess you could say we were poor; we lived in a cement block house outside the city limits of Waterloo, Ia., and my dad worked in the John Deere factory. Money was very tight. I wore a lot of hand-me-downs, and I thought that people who had indoor johns must be rich. I had a really unstable childhood, because my parents were divorced when I was 12, and there was a lot of chaos. I spent a lot of time during my high school years trying to get myself together from my childhood.

Bonnie had majored at first in Drama and then Art. She was paying her way through college by singing. This led to bad grades due to lack of study time. Eventually she gave up on college and came to Chicago to pursue her singing career. When Bonnie was a young child she had always wanted to be an actress, or artist, or singer. She wasn’t sure which one but she knew she didn’t want to end up in a factory job. She began singing at the age of three. We all know of her because of her music but she has also managed to fulfill her other childhood dreams. She has also been in a couple critically acclaimed plays, winning the Theatre World Bronze Award for her role in Joseph Papp’s Broadway production of “The Human Comedy.”

In the early 1980’s with the death of her long time boyfriend friend, Bonnie left Chicago for New York. It was around this time that she started “dabbling” in art again. By 1988 she was finishing up a B.A. in Art. The degree would’ve certified her to teach art for K-12 in Iowa. She had been planning on getting an M.A. in Art.

Bonnie on Art and Music: Someone said to me recently, “Oh, you’re a singer, isn’t it nice that you’re interested in art, too, and getting an art degree.” But I really believe that I am a visual artist who sings. It just happened that I put a lot of time into the singing and developed that. It isn’t like, “Oh, now I’m going to do this.” I could have done it before; it just happened that I put more time into singing. If I had had some great art teachers when I was in high school, I probably would have gone into visual arts right from the start.

While Bonnie has been concentrating on her art work she has not given up on singing. In 1988 she was planning to move to Nashville, marry a writer from Connecticut and continue to write songs and sing and take guitar lessons. She still tours.

A few personal thoughts from Bonnie:

About her early years in Chicago:

“Had I played the piano I never would have been called a folksinger.”

Her fears:

“I hate to fly. My God, I hate to fly . . . I always had anxieties about everything. I wanted to be the kind of woman who was not afraid to go here, go there.”

Growing up in Iowa:

“All the kids I knew married and their husbands worked in the factory. I just thought I want more than this. I didn’t want to be ordinary.”
Howard Levy is a musician without limits. His musical adventures include journeys into many realms—jazz, pop, rock, world music, Latin, classical, folk, blues, country, theater, TV, film, commercials. Along the way, he has appeared on more than a hundred albums, won a Grammy, won a Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Original Music for a Play, and performed six times on The Tonight Show.

Known for his fine piano playing and ability to play many instruments, it is on the harmonica that Howard Levy has made the greatest impact. He has developed a fully chromatic style on the standard 10 hole diatonic harmonica, revolutionizing harmonica technique and taking the instrument into exciting new territory.

From 1989 to 1992, Howard was a member of the trailblazing contemporary jazz group Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. In 1993 and 1994, he toured and recorded two albums with Kenny Loggins, and formed Trio Globo with Eugene Friesen and Glen Velez. The Trio has two CDs on the Silver Wave label. Before and during those years, Howard also performed and recorded with Dolly Parton, Styx, John Prine, Paquito D’Rivera, Claudio Roditi, Ken Nordine, Bonnie Koloc, and many others.

Howard has also been active internationally. Several projects for The Southwest German Radio Network (SWF) in Baden-Baden; recordings and performances of Michael Reissler’s Momentum Mobile (released as a CD on the Enja label); international tours and two award-winning CDs, The Sultan’s Picnic and OddTimes, with Rabih Abou Khalil; A CD, The Old Country, with classical guitarist Miroslav Tadic and drummer Mark Nauseef, recorded in Japan for the audiophile label, M.A; The Music of Jimi Hendrix at the 1995 Stuttgart Jazz Open with Jack Bruce, Trilok Gurtu, Pharoah Sanders, et al.

In the Spring of 1995, Howard premiered his composition “Harmonia Mundi, Suite for Harmonica and Chamber Ensemble”, commissioned by The Rembrandt Chamber Players of Chicago. The Chicago Tribune called it “a dazzler, with tuneful melodies, relentless rhythmic drive and imaginative interplay between the players.” There have also been performances in Louisville, KY, La Grande, OR, and Bremen, Germany (part of Howard Levy Harpology Festival for Radio Bremen).

Howard’s harmonica is the featured instrument on the soundtrack of A Family Thing, with Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones. He also played for Striptease, with Demi Moore, and A Time to Kill, based on the James Gresham novel. And he won a Grammy (Pop Instrumental) for “The Sinister Minister” with The Flecktones. He has toured recently with Rabih Abou Khalil, Michael Reissler, Ken Nordine and Laurie Anderson, Brazilian artists Rosanna and Zelia, Ben Sidran, and played in a tribute to Charlie Mariano in Stuttgart. Also performed as a special guest and judge at The International Harmonica Conference in Trossingen. He co-wrote a musical, Tales from Trashmania, with Bonnie Koloc, which was produced in Fall of 1997.

Education

Howard Levy studied piano and theory at The Manhattan School of Music in N.Y. for four years, then studied pipe organ with Carl Lambert for two years. He attended Northwestern University in Evanston, IL for two years, playing in the Jazz band.

As a music educator, Howard has taught hundreds of students privately, and has been a guest lecturer at Dartmouth College, Northwestern University, Francis Parker School, given jazz clinics at colleges and high schools, and has given over a hundred performances of “Music from around the World,” a program of international music for children and adults. Howard performed 20 shows in Evanston, IL (with bassist Larry Kohut) of “The Many Worlds of the Harmonica.”

He also taught harmonica for 7 summers at The Augusta Heritage Arts Workshop in Elkins, WV, and World Music in 1984 at The Omega Institute in New York. To deal with the increased demands for lessons, Howard released an instructional video on Homespun Tapes. Called “New Directions for Harmonica,” it deals with every aspect of Howard’s revolutionary techniques, repair and adjustment of the harmonica, improvisation music theory, and even has a section that shows what goes on inside a harmonica player’s mouth as he plays, through the use of ultrasound.