

Ani

B I O G R A P H Y



photo by Albert Sanchez

In a music industry dominated by cookie-cutter acts and bottom-dollar business decisions, Ani DiFranco is proof positive that you don't have to play by anyone's rules but your own. Starting out with little more than an acoustic guitar, a powerhouse voice, and enthusiastic friends and fans who supported her vision, she has built a steady career as a performer, songwriter, and recording artist of international renown.

Following early training as a dancer, Ani began earning her musical chops in the bars of Buffalo, New York, as a teenager in the mid-1980s — a new-school folkie in the heyday of old-school synthpop. Every few days over the years that followed she'd blitz into a new club in a new town for

another of her funny, funky, intimate gigs, stun everybody in the room with her musicianship and her unflinching observations about the state of her world, and leave behind a fresh batch of converts eager to spread the word to everyone they knew.

More than a decade has passed and it's been that way pretty much ever since, only the venue these days is more likely to be Carnegie Hall than Nietzsche's in Buffalo, and word-of-mouth is accompanied by ecstatic reviews from the nation's top critics, network TV appearances, and even a bit of radio airplay — all of which she has achieved without a penny of outside support. In addition to crisscrossing the States virtually nonstop, she now plays Europe, Australia, and Japan on a regular basis. Ani's stage setup has changed a bit, too: from solo to guitar-plus-drummer to trio to 6-piece band complete with keyboards and horn section (the lineup featured on her 2002 live album, *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter*). Elsewhere in her bag of tricks have been a couple of stints with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, cameos with Maceo Parker's band when the legendary horn player opened for her, and a memorable tour swapping songs with fellow singer-songwriters Greg Brown and Gillian Welch. Most recently, Ani has been getting back to basics as a solo act again, much to the delight of longtime admirers of her ever-changing repertoire and charismatic stage presence.

Along the way, she has grown as a recording artist, with 14 full-length albums under her belt as of 2002. Of those, the last half-dozen have made the *Billboard* charts, garnering 4 Grammy nominations to date, a feat which is all the more impressive given that they've all been released on her own label, Righteous Babe Records. (The company's staff has ballooned to 15 or so, making RBR one of the main reasons anybody moves to Buffalo these days.) With the creation in 2001 of the London office, Righteous Babe Records, Ltd., all of Ani's albums are also available throughout Europe on her own terms.

In the course of recording, Ani has honed her skills as a producer, finding innovative ways to convey the spontaneity, intensity and humor of her concerts on disc. Consequently, other artists have come calling, and you'll find Ani's production credits on albums by Bitch and Animal, Utah Phillips, Dan Bern, and Janis Ian, as well as on the live Woody Guthrie tribute album *'Til We Outnumber 'Em*, which features performances by Bruce Springsteen, Indigo Girls, Billy Bragg, Dave Pirner, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Arlo Guthrie and Ani herself. She has also contributed her voice and/or guitar to albums by the likes of Prince, John Gorka, and Bruce Cockburn. Then, of course, there's her duet with Jackie Chan (yes, you read that right), the cover of her song "Joyful Girl" by Dave Matthews and Soulive, and the hip hop version of her poem "Self Evident" by Chuck D's supergroup, The Impossibles.

For Ani, politics and art are inseparable. She's an outspoken feminist who doesn't run from that particular f-word, and she has gladly lent her time and talents to such diverse pursuits as opposing the death penalty, upholding women's reproductive rights, preserving historic buildings in her hometown, and promoting queer visibility. Through the Righteous Babe Foundation, she's able to support grassroots cultural and political organizations around the country. Ani has never run from controversy, and the oft-quoted liner notes of her 1990 debut album still ring true today: "I speak without reservation from what I know and who I am. I do so with the understanding that all people should have the right to offer their voice to the chorus whether the result is harmony or dissonance." Twelve years later, of course, the audience for her words is far larger, but Ani continues to speak and sing her mind without fear or concession.

Ani was born to play music in front of folks, and she's been doing that night after night for most of her life. She's an artist of constant surprises whose work only grows richer with the passage of time. As *Vanity Fair* puts it, "DiFranco's musicianship broadens, more diverse and more jazz- and funk-proficient than ever. The one thing that can't improve: her astonishing voice, coolly, permanently urgent, tugging at the sleeve or close at the ear, like the murmur of a lover who knows every last secret and decides to stay."

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Q U O T E S



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“With DiFranco you delight in the joy of being sung to by a person who never underestimates herself or her audience.”

–BBC ONLINE

“DiFranco continues to be relevant because, in this apocalyptic age when the enemy is so clearly us, we need a courageous, creative voice to point out that frightening fact. We need risk-taking artists like DiFranco to hold the mirror of poetry in front of us, forcing us to confront our fears, and our sins of commission and omission. Only then can change happen.”

– CLEVELAND FREE TIMES

“Equally powerful during the quietest moments as when the band is in full throttle.”

–THE LA TIMES

“It’s long past time for DiFranco to be recognized as one of the most creative and gifted lyricists in contemporary rock music. ... Like Paul Westerberg and Tom Waits, DiFranco possesses the singular gift of being able to tell you every damn thing you need to know about a character in the first four lines of a song.”

– PHOENIX NEW TIMES

“DiFranco gets her groove on:

A folksinger of ingenuity and vision – both expansive and intimately engaged.”

–SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

“An icon of independence [who] charts her career with values like personal integrity rather than fame and fortune.”

– CURVE

“DiFranco’s ability to infuse the live performance of her music with timeliness, political resonance and long, hard looks at joy make her that rarest of modern artists: a songwriter whose work holds a mirror up to the listener and encourages them to consider just what they see.”

– THE BUFFALO NEWS

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Ani

C O N C E R T R E V I E W



The Washington Post

June 20, 2001
by Teresa Wiltz

It's only folk music, she says. Oh, but the folkie doth protest a tad too much. At first blush, Ani DiFranco seems the darling of the slacker set, outfitted with far left-of-center politics, dreadlocks and the requisite raging against the odiousness of the corporate machine.

Some would dismiss DiFranco as granola, and in saying so, overlook the land mines hiding out amid the oats and nuts. Funk served up with the folk. Bitter mixed in with the blues. As was evidenced by her sold-out set Monday night at Wolf Trap, the poet/singer/songwriter/bongo drummer/bisexual/married lady/record label CEO and self-described bearded lady isn't wont to confine her scribblings within conventional musical lines.

Over the years, without benefit of lavish attention from MTV or perennial airplay on alternative rock stations, DiFranco has managed to carve out a highly successful indie career, smacking the outstretched hands of record label execs as she cranked out 13 albums in 10 years and nurturing a wildly appreciative fan base of high school and college-age kids who keep listening long after they've graduated and moved on to grown-up life.

To attend an Ani DiFranco concert is to participate in a benediction: That it's okay to be female, it's okay to be weird, to care about something more than snagging a boy — or a girl. That it's okay to be the bearded lady.

Once she traveled light, the guitar-playing apex of a musical triangle completed with only drums and bass. Now, DiFranco has expanded her sound to encompass a mini-orchestra of sorts: Shane Endsley on trumpet; Hans Teuber on alto sax and flute; Julie Wolf on keyboards; Daren Hahn on drums; and Jason Mercer on electric and upright bass. With such aural amplifications, her sound now has a richer hue, folk tunes painted over shades of jazz fusion, funk, hip-hop, bossa nova and salsa.

The result is beautiful music, moody noodlings punctuated by the wail of the sax or the acoustic punch of rhythm guitar. There's a reason why Prince described DiFranco's guitar work as "the most expressive acoustic playing" he's ever heard and James Brown's right-hand dude, Maceo Parker, jams with her whenever he can.

She's got chops.

Playing primarily from her latest double-CD set, *Revelling/Reckoning*, DiFranco punched out her tunes with quirky little rhythms that strayed just outside the expected beat. Her voice is lovely, a supple instrument that whispers and wails, swoops and soars into a hyperactive scat. But more often than not, she kept her gifts to herself, instead speak-singing her lyrics, her words percussive hits flowing into melodic musings.

"It's hard to keep up with time once it's on its way," she sings. Indeed, time has tempered her rage somewhat. This is a more

DiFranco's Hardly Simple Folk



photo by Susan Azner

mellow DiFranco, a 30-year-old who's still wringing out her music with every muscle of her tiny body, but holding back just a bit.

Again and again, she plunged into a swamp rank with the stink of real emotion, rolling around in the muck of love and betrayal, selfishness and compromise, loss and gain. She sings of being weak — "I wish I were strong" — but onstage, there was no doubt of the strength inherent in her fearlessness. She laid herself bare, cloaked only in her nakedly confessional poetry.

And the audience of mostly poignant, pierced young women wouldn't, couldn't let her go, the screams of their standing ovation ricocheting through Wolf Trap, their lighters aloft, poking the darkness like fireflies playing in the night sky.

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C O N C E R T R E V I E W S



Los Angeles Times

DiFranco Continues Her Streak of Independence

July 3, 2001
by Natalie Nichols

Considering the state of the nation these days, one might have expected socially conscious singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco to focus on the many overtly political tunes in her vast arsenal on Sunday at the Universal Amphitheatre. But as always, the independent artist went her own way, using compassion and wry wit to examine not the big political picture, but the underlying personal divides that lead to misunderstanding, prejudice and, finally, larger injustice.

"Here's a lovely folk song about sex work," joked DiFranco, introducing her 1994 tune "Letter to a John." Going beyond humanizing a pariah, the ironically upbeat number limned a lap dancer's hidden pain, pushing into a customer's face the lifetime of humiliation and abuse behind every rote gyration, every on-cue smile.

Yet DiFranco's detailed, stream-of-consciousness style also deftly captured various states of relationships, with others as well as oneself. Even a soul-searching ballad as seemingly depressing as "Grey," from her stellar new double-CD collection *Revelling/Reckoning*, was reassuring rather than bleak. And her low-key recitation of Prince's "When You Were Mine" illuminated both the heartbreak and the resignation of loving someone so much you set her free.

Even when taking on larger issues, DiFranco wrapped them in intimate terms. The wistful "Subdivision" reflected on the toll taken by the racial and economic divides in her hometown, Buffalo, NY, not to mention the rest of the country.

But she was no dour doomsayer. Indeed, the diminutive performer leaped about so gleefully at first that her feet scarcely seemed to touch down. Leading her quintet of bass, keyboards, reeds, horns and drums, she played kinetic, rhythmic acoustic and occasionally electric guitar. The blend of folk, funk and jazz was alternately tightly executed and sprawling in seemingly infinite jams, with Latin flavors sometimes evoking a folkier Santana.

The group's approach unified the sometimes disparate folksy and funky halves of the new album and brought earlier works up to date. Yet in moments when DiFranco stood alone, she strummed her guitar with staccato fury, stripping back time to her beginning days as a scrappy folk singer.

Her vocals often served as another instrument, sometimes talk-singing with percussive oomph, at other times tumbling in a breathless, jazz-like near-scat, elsewhere wailing wordlessly.

Between songs she chatted amiably, at one point recalling a recent concert by veteran folk singer Ferron, whose own intimate style and early independent releases created something of a blueprint for artists such as DiFranco.

If Ferron's work was considered "womyn's" music in its '70s and '80s heyday, DiFranco has both inherited and transcended that role. Sure, the largely female audience drew strength and comfort from her honesty, compassion and unflinching zeal, but the men were never made to feel like perpetrators. To DiFranco, anyone who is moved by what concerns her is in the same boat.

The AQUARIAN

Sweetness and Exultance

May 2, 2001
by James Campion

Ani DiFranco's one-woman, nitroglycerine-meets-match acoustic performance at Carnegie Hall on a foggy Friday night in midtown Manhattan was nothing short of a pristine musical tour de force.

Thrashing through an eclectic repertoire of be-bop bluegrass and funk-laden folk, sparing no emotion along the way, DiFranco regaled the adoring packed house with tales of political woe and soul-searching poetry, capturing that rare marriage between artist and venue that is best defined by the inexplicable measurement of fate.

Draped in a black ensemble she described as "thrown together," and hardly intimidated by the 110-year-old grand musical palace, DiFranco embraced the spacious loom of the stage as if she were a haunting echo from its glorious past. Yet the entire evening never strayed from the intimacy of a smoky roadside bar with a folkie in the corner crooning road-weary ballads.

With a Woody Guthrie pout and a Keith Richards strut, DiFranco relentlessly pounded and beautifully caressed a host of guitars, while weaving and contorting her tiny body, but it was in those moments of jarring silence that she exalted the performance to levels of brilliant expression.

Each song from DiFranco's vast catalogue of self-published work seemed to drift and dance along the gorgeous architecture as she glided in and out of the deep blue and soft red of the stage lights like a wandering minstrel vagabond, chirping and braying and screaming and singing with soft, childlike sweetness.

Featured throughout the hour-and-a-half show were new numbers from her *Revelling/Reckoning* two-CD set to be released four days hence, including the wistful ode to jealousy, "Revelling," the soul-searching "Subdivision" and the tearfully melodic "Garden of Simple."

The new material segued seamlessly into the more well-known classics that DiFranco introduced time and again in a whisper as "one from way back then." There was a palpable kinship between each song, spanning layers of her artistic maturation, as if they were innocent children from various cultures walking hand-in-hand with one purpose, to cajole and provoke, but never stand still.

Particularly moving were rousing versions of "Out Of Range," "Shameless," "Tis' of Thee" and the longing lilt of "Both Hands," which completed several charged encores, as DiFranco edged to the lip of the stage to thank the hysterical crowd with one final, emphatic chord.

A high-wire musical act worthy of awe, Ani DiFranco never fails to deliver the goods without a hint of pretension and pop posturing so prevalent in many of today's artists, and at merely 30 years of age, she is the salvation of pure musical performance. And on this night, there could have been no better example.

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C O N C E R T R E V I E W



DiFranco's eclectic music delivers the goods Unconventional performer shines in Hard Rock concert

Sunday, March 03, 2002
By Doug Elfman

The tattoo of a necklace peaked over the top of her shirt. She stood on the dusky stage, confident but not cocky. Wearing pulled-back dreadlocks. Holding a microphone with strong guitar arms. She was just then peaking dramatically for the night, in front of 2,000 fans at the Hard Rock Hotel. She was delivering an astonishing spoken-word song about post-Sept. 11 America.

The fallen World Trade Center towers, she asserted, were prestigious giraffes "on the bow of Noah's Ark" that were destroyed "on the day that America fell to its knees, after strutting around for a century without saying 'thank you' or 'please.'"

Her insolence, as fans of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." might reckon her, strode more ardent, onward. We've seen war change people to the point that even old hippie James Taylor has been displaying the American flag on stage. But Ani DiFranco will have no part of what she decried as the "hypocritical chants of 'Freedom Forever!'" "You can keep the Pentagon. Keep the propaganda. Keep each and every TV that's been trying to convince me to participate in some prep school punk's plan to perpetuate retribution. ..."

"All over the country, folks just shake their heads and pour" another drink, she said.

Without a drink in hand, DiFranco toasted the sacrificed worlds of El Salvador and Mount Rushmore. She toasted inmates on death row. She toasted "all those nurses and doctors who daily provide women with a choice, who stand down a threat the size of Oklahoma City just to listen to a young woman's voice."

For that, fans screamed fiercely in approval.

"Take away our PlayStations, and we are a Third World nation under the thumb of some blue blood royal son," she said of President Bush, "who bought the Oval Office and that phony election. And I'll tell you what. While we're at it, let me state unequivocally he is not president of me."

Someone who does not cotton to DiFranco's political persuasion might now be wondering why any corporate record company would give DiFranco money to express her indefatigable point of view. The answer is that no record company would do so.

DiFranco, 31, worked and saved and finally built her own record company, Righteous Babe Records in her hometown of Buffalo, N.Y. In the process, she made herself America's most successful independent musician, successful in that she gets her financially viable albums shipped to music stores and fans without the help of a Warner Brothers-size distributor. Prince has tried to follow her independent footsteps in the past few years, with less success. Someone who wishes her proudly liberal, and largely followed, voice would not

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL

find ears would be wishing in vain. Here in Las Vegas, the capital of glitz and glamour, this self-described folk artist of anti-glitz and anti-glamour attracted 2,000 wildly enthusiastic fans to a sold-out concert in the glitzy Hard Rock Hotel on a Friday night. Naturally, fans probably would not have been there just for the social commentary. DiFranco sang 100 minutes' worth of her unique anti-pop songs while backed up by five great band members. DiFranco's strong voice danced and skipped about like a jazz instrument. There is an old jazz trick that lets an instrumentalist play notes as if he or she is talking them, which adds humanity to their instrument's texture. DiFranco's approach often seems to be the opposite of that.

It was as if her voice was born out of the rhythms and dynamics of a John Coltrane- and Miles Davis-educated jazz instrument. She'd stammer articulately ... pause ... then rap very clearly until she ... sang so pretty and loud like a diva. This added the technical gravitas of an instrument's eloquence to the humanity of her voice.

Her band suited her perfectly. The trumpet player, saxophonist, bassist (sometime playing an upright) and drummer built a foundation of soul-jazz, while keyboardist Julie Wolf added a fat, fun layer of Hammond-style melodies.

DiFranco handled guitar herself, both acoustic and electric, strumming them, pounding them and finger-picking like a mad woman at times, while also talk-singing, making funny faces and grooving around the stage. She never ran out of fuel.

Some DiFranco chroniclers peg her as a punk-folkie. But listening to her songs in concert – the intoxicating waltz of "Dilate," the melodic "Napoleon," the drum-and-voice "Freakshow" – gives the impression that she is a many-hyphenated woman. Jazz-rock-folk-entertainer-poet.

And her songs are poetry, or prose. They are straightforward storytelling and conversational. But her writing is also incredibly pointed and emotionally compelling. There was the direct, intrapersonal confession of, "I just want you to live up to the image of you I create. I see you, and I'm so unsatisfied. I see you, and I dilate." There was the personal metaphor of, "My [vagina] is a tractor, and this is a tractor pull." And those were just several of hundreds of smart lines.

Fans, mostly women but not very disproportionately so, cheered with fervor. DiFranco was good to them, first. Tickets cost a friendly \$33. Her paraphernalia booth offered posters for only \$7, as well as political literature about saving the Earth from various ills.

DiFranco is trying to save the world while also singing, opining and stirring excitement in others. Politicians should have such courage and ability.

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C O N C E R T R E V I E W



photo by Susan Alzner

March 6, 2002
by Josef Woodard

By the youth-oriented standards of pop music, DiFranco is virtually a veteran at age 32, having been at this – and on her own terms – for a dozen years now. This doesn't mean, however, that the ever restless singer-songwriter-activist has stuck to a predictable pattern or rested on her laurels as an artist. If she came out of the folk scene initially, DiFranco literally has moved "out" of it, and followed a wandering heart through various genre landscapes. At the Arlington, the style at hand was a sort of organic house blend of folk, Prince-ish funk, jazz and a personal brand of rap, drawing on a gymnastic way of phrasing that hints at jazz scatting and the tongue-trickery of rap but is really her own style. Call it DiFranco-ese.

Monday night she came on strong, and stayed that way. Her latest album – her 13th released on her own Righteous Babe label – is the double-disc and emotionally multi-faceted *Revelling/Reckoning*, with funky, uptempo groove numbers with her band balanced by introspective guitar-based tunes. Live, though, she stayed primarily locked into the more intense side of things, which gave a deserved spotlight to an excellent band: tasteful horn players Todd Horton and Hans Teuber, highly musical drummer Daren Hahn, bassist Jason Mercer and versatile keyboardist Julie Wolf. It was great to hear a live, real-time band that capitalized on instrumental colors beyond the usual crutches of guitar or samplers.

SANTA BARBARA NEWS • PRESS

What was missing was the chilling mellow side of her work. Even when the band took a breather and she accompanied herself on guitar (which she plays with an increasing facility), the spirit was taut and feisty. There was nothing mellow here, sonically or rhythmically, yet there is plenty of emotional heat and sensitivity in her lyrics.

One of the most powerful moments in the show came not from her back history but through a compelling poetic rant about the implications of Sept. 11, "the day that America sank to its knees, after a century of not saying 'thank you' or 'please.'" She openly attacked President Bush, from his dubious entry into office to his tight connection with the oil industry.

The ear-opening, nerve-rattling piece, on which the band joined in with a late-era Miles Davis-ish groove, deserves to be heard beyond the usual circle of followers. Whatever one's response to her heated leftist observations, the piece has an intensity reminiscent of Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," from the early 1970s. DiFranco is unabashed in her will to insert political consciousness into her work at a time when social commentary in pop seems to be on vacation. By the time DiFranco and band ended a show well-stocked with old favorites and new ideas, the crowd seemed duly sated. Yet, it also seemed that they wanted more access to one of the few genuine musical heroines out there doing it.

Ani

A L B U M R E V I E W S

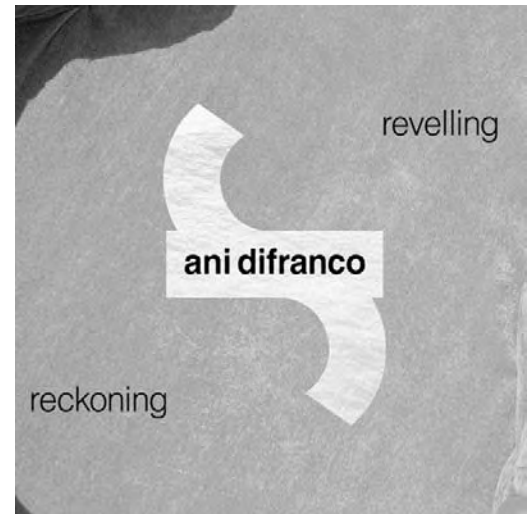


May 24, 2001
by Parke Puterbaugh

Rolling Stone

Renegade folkie rocks hard and cuts deep

Like Prince, another highly motivated renegade, Ani DiFranco demands much of herself and her fans. Uncompromising and emotionally charged, *Revelling/Reckoning* is a dizzying double-disc, twenty-nine-track ziggurat. The first disc, *Revelling*, is more outward-focused and band-oriented, judiciously incorporating funk and jazz elements. *Reckoning* is more introspective and spare, featuring DiFranco's prickly finger-picking. Cool, lilting horns decorate "What How When Where (Why Who)," an audacious collage of urban R&B vocals, abstract guitar licks, cool-jazz horns, and New Orleans parade rhythms. DiFranco's rapier-sharp lyrics cut to the bone in "Your Next Bold Move," a thoughtful diatribe about capitalism run amok, in which she muses, "What a waste of thumbs that are opposable / To make machines that are disposable." Elsewhere, she tackles the widening rich-poor schism, the economic choke-hold exerted by multinational corporations, dirty air, HIV, environmental cancers and, of course, her own personal revellings and reckonings. Check out this nugget from "Garden of Simple": "Science chases money, and money chases its tail / The best minds of my generation can't make bail." *Revelling/Reckoning* is powerful listening for anyone struggling to make sense of a seemingly capsizing world.



April 13, 2001
by RC

Entertainment

Two hours. That's a lot to demand of today's audience. But listening to the tunes on this beautifully packaged double-disc set is like dipping your hand into a drawerful of snapshots. Pick from either the funky *Revelling* or the more downbeat *Reckoning*, and you'll be rewarded with an intimate new mood or insight, expertly framed by the singer's acoustic-based every-style.

"Her best yet: heart-stoppingly beautiful in a tough, free-flowing, acoustic jazz-influenced way. DiFranco's singing and songwriting are stronger than ever." - THE [LONDON] TIMES

"Ani DiFranco grows up without softening up. ... Even detailing a subtle valence - a couple whose emotions run on different tracks - her plain speech has lost none of its insistence. And once again, anything seems possible." - SPIN

"A perfect album for anybody dealing with an overwhelming world." - MINNESOTA DAILY

"DiFranco does things with words that others can only dream about." - RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

Ani

Q & A



Ani DiFranco talks about the making of her new album, *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter*.

Q : Like *Living in Clip*, the new album marks the end of an era, since you're no longer performing live with the players from *So Much Shouting*.

AD : When I first gathered the horn section, there was a constant sense of energy and movement; we were collectively creating all these arrangements, and there was always a new song, or a new arrangement of an old song. It was a thrill for me to be learning from other musicians and from working with new instruments. Then there was the experience of being a bandleader, which is a whole other bag of donuts; in order to keep six people improvising well together, somebody has to be leading it, and I was very inspired by that job. Now I've decided to go solo and conserve a little energy and refocus. But I love my band so much, and I'm very sad that this is kind of a posthumous album for a band that will no longer be.

Q : How did you select which songs and which recordings of them to include on the new album?

AD : Certain evenings are represented heavily, because they were the ones I went to out of memory. There are two or three tracks from Boise and Philadelphia, and a few from LA and Phoenix. There was so much mayhem in the recording process that I gave up very quickly on the notion of finding perfect versions of any of these songs; there's no such thing on tape, let alone in my mind. The performances are 'flawed,' certainly, but my mission became simply to find technically passable tapes from nights I remember enjoying, listen to the songs I was interested in representing, and then ask myself the question, 'Is the spirit here? That's what I most wanted to document: the interaction among the musicians, and between the musicians and the audience.'

Q : *Living in Clip* has a distinct beginning, middle and end, but the new album is organized somewhat differently. How did you arrive at the order of the songs?

AD : In terms of structuring the record, I mixed very quickly; I would mix one, two,



photo by Albert Sanchez

begin with "hey, everybody, welcome" and it doesn't end with "thanks a lot for coming, bye." I began to conceive of the songs on it as stray cats that are finding homes on this album. It very much begins in the middle; on the first track you're plopped into this little bar in Nantes, France, where I'm wrestling with my guitar sound. The second record is more like a show. [The title,] "Girls Singing Night," comes from a joke I was making with Julie at the time, two feminists poking fun at the stereotype of ourselves as humorless and self-righteous. [We were also performing a lot of duets together, and] I guess I included some of my more classic feminist songs on that second disc, too.

Q : You recently released a live DVD, *Render*. What's the connection between that project and this one?

AD : The live album took so long because I was working on that movie; it just ate my head for a year. There's only one track on the album that also appears in the movie. There were originally going to be more; I thought that the projects would be released in tandem and that they would be more related to each other, but as it turns out, making a movie is even more work than making two records, and to do all of those things together was just impossible. I ended up feeling that the projects were not so connected that they would have a lot of overlapping material, so I [kept] just the one song, "Dilate," in both, but in the movie I stop in the middle and scold the audience for being so loud and disruptive, and then on the record I edited out the interruption. It's my last laugh, so to speak — that through the magic of tape editing I could make room for the song that I didn't feel was there in the moment. The other connection to the movie is that when I was filmed in the studio in Texas, I was mixing the track "Loom" for the live album. It's kind of a mirror in a mirror: here's the record I was trying to get finished while so much of my time was being usurped by that moviemaking saga.

Q : "Girls Singing Night" begins with the pre-show broadcast of a spoken-word track from one of your collaborations with Utah Phillips, *Fellow Workers*, in which

three songs a day, and I would either leave some talking before a song to make it feel more natural, or I would leave none. Usually I left none, because there was so much music, and when I'm performing with the band I don't do as much talking. Sometimes I would fade out the applause at the end, because I was sick of hearing screaming. I was sort of at the mercy of my own whim when I was compiling the records, because [I'd discover that] this one ends like this and this one begins like this, and how do I put those next to each other? I kept going over the possibilities for the albums to flow in and out of themselves and one into the other, and I ended up with two discs, "Stray Cats" and "Girls Singing Night." The titles come literally out of little bits of conversation I left on the records. On the first one there are a lot of references to cats [, for instance]. The first record is less linear, too; it doesn't

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Q & A



he's quoting a famous speech by one of the leaders of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement.

AD : That was taken from a particular night in LA. You hear Utah's voice, you get a feel for the room, and then we walk out onstage to play "Ain't That The Way." I was using that recording before the first song of the night because I love Mario Savio's sentiment: that it's so easy to be complicit in our society, and unless you are free you must throw your body against the gears and try to stop the machine in whatever way you can. It's such an eloquent expression of the whole reason that I'm out there and I'm dragging all these other people around with me. We're setting ourselves to that task of trying to create an alternative to the destructive Machine, whether it be the music industry or capitalism [in general].

Q : You performed the song/poem "Self-Evident" as a work in progress for most of the last year, adding and changing lines and musical elements from night to night – you don't often do that, do you?

AD : That was more of a public process than usual, because of my urgency to speak to the political climate around us all in those early days last fall. We went on tour in September, when everyone else was canceling tours, and there was a palpable energy everywhere I went, everyone thinking of the same thing, searching for alternative voices beyond the t.v. propaganda and the deflating messages from the powers that be. So I began speaking that poem before I'd memorized it, before I'd even finished writing it. I was reading onstage, which is something I almost never do, because I couldn't travel around in this climate and work on it privately any longer. I felt that since this was something we were all working on together as a nation, I could be a little less introverted with my process. But it wasn't until I performed it at Carnegie Hall last April that I felt it was finished. I don't think I've ever had as clear a finishing moment for a song; there was something very ritualized for me about going back to New York, where I was on September 11, and bearing witness before ... all of the other witnesses. It was one of the most profound experiences I've ever had on stage; I launched into it because there it was on my set list, and about 3 seconds in, panic just hit me, like how dare I? Who knows who these people in this audience

are, what happened to them that day, or whom they lost? And sure enough, halfway through I could hear sobbing from the back of the upper balcony in that huge, glorious, cavernous, beautiful, silent room. The emotion that I asked us all to share was extremely cathartic and terrifying – and yet empowering. I felt that night like, okay, this is done now; I've brought it back to where it came from and I've offered it to the people that know, and I apologize for whatever I got wrong or whatever innumerable things I wasn't able to bear witness to, but here's my offering, and if they can accept it, then I think I'll move on.

Q : Where does the version on the album come from?

AD : Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the end of the spring band tour, after that performance in New York. I did it many different ways: way back in September [2001], I was performing it solo and spoken, even during the band shows. And then I heard the recording of it by Chuck D; he and some other rappers who called themselves The Impossibulls had recorded a version of what was then called "Work in Progress" and released a CD of it. He sent me the recording, and it's all these different rappers taking different sections of the poem. We were all listening to it on the bus one night and I thought, "Well, shit! Okay, let's do a musical version ourselves." In the end I arrived at that very ambient and more pared-down arrangement where the band doesn't come in 'til halfway through. My favorite thing about the recording is hearing the audience respond to what's being said; it's so affirming for me to realize how many of us agree on certain things that are not represented in the media. I don't think I'm going to record that poem anymore, I won't put it on my new [studio] album, because there's not really a place for it, and I'm already on to other long, rambling wordy stuff. "Shrug" and "Welcome To:" will reappear in studio versions, but "Self Evident" is just of its time.

Q : Can you say more about those other two new songs?

AD : "Welcome To:" I put at the end of the first record almost like a theoretical bridge into the next one. As for "Shrug," it was the first night we ever played that song on stage. I had just written it; we rehearsed it

that day in sound check in Bozeman, Montana, and performed it that night.

Q : There are also some much older songs of yours on the album, like "Gratitude" and "You Had Time." Am I right that you didn't perform those two for a long time?

AD : Sure, especially "Gratitude." "You Had Time" comes up every few years for a week or two; different songs get preferential treatment or neglect for whatever reasons. The two discs are kind of collections of standards, anchors of my more recent set lists, and then there are anomalies. "Gratitude" was a song we pulled out on the last tour and I thought, well, there's something people don't get to hear a lot. And "Rock Paper Scissors," a song that I hardly ever perform at all: I included a version of Julie and me performing it as a duet; that's something that only happened once. Then there are songs I originally recorded solo, like "Whattall is Nice," which I wrote just before finishing *Revelling/Reckoning* and included on that album in a version I recorded at home. I wanted to represent some of the arrangements that I had with this band of songs that weren't recorded anything close to the same way in the past.

Q : Do songs change meaning when you come back to them after awhile?

AD : Yeah. I find that I'm often not the same person singing. I mean, the songs are there, but there's a new person singing them. Certainly I change them musically to suit the way my ear hears now. It's part of my mission on this live record to repent for some of my sins against my own songs. It saddens me that many of my songs which I like are only represented in recordings which I don't like. So I'm slowly learning, as my life whizzes by me, how to sing them – maybe in a slightly calmer voice, maybe with a little bit more self-possession. I find in performance, I can really communicate my open-heartedness, and my will towards mutual respect and inclusion, but I don't know if I've translated that on my records over the years. Luckily I feel, with each passing day, a little more able to communicate what has always been there in those older songs, that got a bit thwarted by recording studio trauma on their way to tape.

Interview by Ronald Ehmke, 6/28/02

Ani

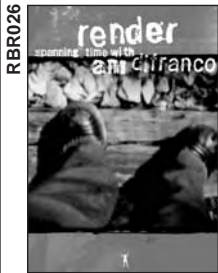
DISCOGRAPHY



2002



**so much shouting,
so much laughter**
(double live album)



render
(DVD / VHS)



revelling/reckoning
(double album)

"DiFranco's current songwriting efforts are deeper, funkier, and more piercingly honest than ever, and her guitar work on acoustic, tenor, baritone, and electric shows the touch of a true master."

—*Acoustic Guitar*



swing set
(6-song EP)

"Another example of the efforts of Righteous Babe and DiFranco to chronicle and keep current the work of pioneer folk artists. Any way you slice it, you win."

—*Bust*



to the teeth

"Her bite intact, the folk-punk icon tops off a decade's worth of music that would take many artists a lifetime to equal."

—*The Des Moines Register*



fellow workers

stories: **UTAH PHILLIPS**,
music & production:
ANI DIFRANCO

"This time Phillips is surrounded with all kinds of diverse musical atmospheres: smoldering soul jazz, foursquare folk strumming, and several quirky-loungey hybrids in between—perfect for those who need a little Tom Jones with their Mother Jones."

—*Spin*



up up up up up up

"By expanding her production palette, DiFranco has made a CD that's less an ancillary byproduct of her incendiary live shows than an album that marks a distinct sonic territory."

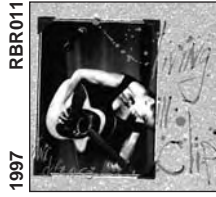
—*The LA Times*



little plastic castle

"A serious expansion of [DiFranco's] musical palette, as though she's thrown open the windows to let the light in and discovered whole new worlds waiting there, new surroundings for her blunt, challenging poetry."

—*Philadelphia Inquirer*



living in clip
(double live album)

"A profound collaboration with her audience — the essence of the rock & roll ideal."

—Dave Marsh,
Addicted to Noise



more joy, less shame
(6-song EP)

"For her fans, this EP will probably be a missing link..."

—*Vancouver Sun*



**the past didn't
go anywhere**

stories: **UTAH PHILLIPS**,
music & production:
ANI DIFRANCO

"The kind of album you want to sit and share a dozen times with a dozen different friends."

—*Austin [Tx] Chronicle*



dilate

"A microscopic examination of envy and adoration, a hard-won lesson that you can't know anyone the way you hoped you could ... a beautiful record... the genuine article."

—*CMJ*



not a pretty girl

"A direct, if sometimes disturbing, view into the collective soul for anyone who stops to listen."

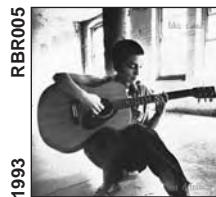
—*Dirty Linen*



out of range

"Pound for pound, the funniest, hurtingest Ani DiFranco outing thus far."

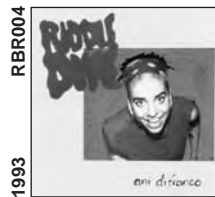
—*The Village Voice*



like i said
(songs 1990-91)

"Subtle but marvellous... DiFranco's growth as a thoughtful, expressive singer informs the delicate, intimate reconsiderations."

—Ira Robbins,
The Trouser Press Guide to '90s Rock
(1997)



puddle dive

"Joined by British harmonica player Rory McLeod, violinist Mary Ramsey, and pianist Ann Rabson of Saffire: The Uppity Blues Women, DiFranco sings songs the way guerrillas fight revolution."

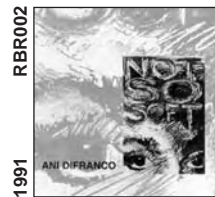
—*The Boston Globe*



imperfectly

"Don't fence her in and don't sell her short. Ani's got passion, humor, and tenderness."

—*Montréal Gazette*



not so soft

"Articulate reflections on a fully engaged young life."

—Robert Christgau,
The Village Voice



ani difranco

"a fertile, melancholy sound and a strong lyricism, held together by her voice, which travels from an exquisitely held high note to a rough growl, from sharply rapped-out rhythms to soft, tremulous notes."

—*Ms.* (1996)