

# arts/entertainment

## Feminist Near integrates beliefs with her music

By Beth Headrick

The Holly Near concert Sunday night made clear that Lincoln has a unified women's community.

At a time when Nancy Reagan's wardrobe dominates the evening news and Alexander Haig's steely blue eyes stand behind militant words, those two hours of music were a soul healer.

Near's lyrics are simple and at times could be corny if not for her clear, strong voice and the sophisticated piano style of Adrienne Torf. There's an earthy quality in Near's looks and in how she expresses herself that's very appealing. The woman has guts. She's political and she integrates her art with her beliefs.

### review

The music is not only feminist but also labor-oriented. It's not confined to workers in this country but has a world scope, as in "Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida" dedicated to the martyrs of the Chilean revolution.

In the tradition of Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger, her songs are about organizing, resistance and human rights, issues reminiscent of the union songs from the 1930s.

Near's lyrics not only represent the labor-force's heritage but also women's heritage. In a medley that Near described as "songs about confinement," she sang for the many women who have been institutionalized for fighting back and being different. She chastises herself for not standing up for women in the past, but the repeating chorus of "We're coming for you," implies that women are standing up now after looking at history from a new perspective.

The medley ended with "Fight Back," a song she said she wrote in an hour for a rally in Los Angeles when the women in that city were terrorized by the "L.A. Strangler."

In a song co-written by Jeff Langley, Near does a turn-around in attitude that is part of any woman's awareness process. The song is about getting to know an older woman. At first the younger woman is condescending, but

as they grow close, the young woman recognizes the beauty and strength that lie in the painful history of women.

In an interview, Near's positive attitude was evident. She and two women started their own record company, Redwood Records, in 1973. The requests for her music came that year during her anti-war tour with Jane Fonda. She said after awhile she felt stupid sending people cassettes of her music. The company has grown from printing 2,000 copies of her album, *Hang in There*, to 35,000 copies of her fifth album, which will be released in March.

Near sings for the labor movement, for the oppressed, against war and against nuclear power, but her music is not trendy. She avoids the left's rhetoric. Her songs are written about real events on a basic human level.

Her voice range can give one word power and the next line a hushed poignancy. Susan Freundlich's sign language interpretation was creative, in places, choreographed like dance.

The room in the Nebraska Union was packed. The people in that room know each other or at least recognize one another. Near sings about unifying for common causes, and people left the auditorium looking thoughtful.

Near prefaced one of her songs by saying that in-group fighting is an easy out from fighting against the real oppressors. In these times, Near warned, women can't afford to do that.



Photo courtesy of Redwood Records

## Amtrak gives foreigners bargain

Commentary by Robert Bauer

If the university gave all out-of-state students a 50 percent reduction in tuition, but made all Nebraska residents pay full tuition, there would probably be a lot of irate Nebraskans, agreed? It makes sense that Nebraskans, who support the institution, get a break, right? It all seems reasonable, doesn't it?

A year or two ago Amtrak ended its USA Railpass fare. This was an unlimited use fare in which a customer paid a set rate, perhaps \$250, for 15 days of unlimited travel. The fare is a real boon to students and in Europe is about as common as Scotch tape, Coke, Gummy Bears, and French bread. Amtrak, however, said that it couldn't afford to offer this fare. The excuse was, as I recall, that too many people were using it.

### departures

Well, let's take a quick look at Amtrak, the glorious passenger rail service that the government took over in the mid-70s, and has heavily subsidized with our tax dollars ever since. To make matters worse, Amtrak, already enjoying a chunk of your tax dollars, is giving better service to foreign tourists who come to this country than to the millions of Americans who support it. Ronald Reagan should take a close look at this one.

That in itself is real depressing news to anybody who might have been planning on seeing the USA by rail. What's worse is that Amtrak continues to offer that fare to everyone *except Americans*. That's right. If you and a Canadian walk up to an Amtrak ticket office the Canadian will whip out his USA Railpass and go wherever he wants, and you will fork over a tremendous amount of money just to equal all the travel he can take advantage of with his Railpass.

Of course, Amtrak's Railpasses aren't tremendous bargains when compared to those in the rest of the world. A 30-day pass for the Canadian will cost him \$500 in this country, while in his own country a similar VIA Canada rail pass cost 30 percent less.

The point, of course, is that Amtrak has turned into a real slap in the face. We support it with our tax dollars, get service that the Europeans snicker at, and pay fares that are outrageous. Amtrak has been a sorry failure, the noble experiment that didn't produce.

Amtrak officials will choke on all of this. They claim ridership is up, their record is getting better, and (as the commercials proclaim) "America is getting into training." Of course, they don't tell you that when you call their toll-free number to make a reservation that you have to wait five or 10 minutes, if you can get through at all. Nor do they tell you that you can pay for a seat on Amtrak but when the train pulls in (at 5 a.m., three hours late) there isn't one for you.

With train systems like Amtrak around it's no wonder the Germans are so proud of the Bundesbahn.

## Educational network airs 'Sandhills Album'

The life and lifestyles of Nebraska's common man during the past century are presented through the medium of photography when "Wednesday Showcase" airs "Sandhills Album," this Wednesday, at 9 p.m. on all stations of the Nebraska Educational Television Network. The locally produced program will repeat Saturday at 2 p.m.

The 60-minute program presents a collection of photographic records of the Sandhills region and its people through the eyes of six photographers. The photographs capture the divergent life-styles of past and present Nebraskans and dramatically emphasize the importance of photography in the recording of culture and history.

"Sandhills Album" is produced and written by Joel Geyer, and narrated by Regina Shonka, both of UNL Television. Funding for the special program was provided by the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, and Nebraskans for Public Television, Inc.

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5:30-7:30-9:30  
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*The Mirror Crack'd*  
5:20-7:25-9:30  
JANE FONDA  
LILY TOMLIN  
**9 to 5**  
5:15-7:15 LILY TOMLIN  
-9:15  
THE INCREDIBLE  
SHRINKING  
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