

LINCOLN
CENTER

presents

American Songbook

Friday Evening, January 19, 2007, at 8:30

Serious Playground: The Songs of Laura Nyro

Judy Kuhn

JEFFREY KLITZ, *Music Director and Piano*

ZEV KATZ, *Bass*

SCOTT NEUMANN, *Drums*

IRA SIEGEL, *Guitar*

AARON HEICK, *Reeds*

BARRY DANIELIAN, *Trumpet*

LARRY FARRELL, *Trombone*

ALAN STEPANSKY, *Cello*

JAMIE LEONHART and VICTORIA CAVE, *Vocals*

*This program is approximately 75 minutes long
and will be performed without intermission.*

Steinway Piano

Major support for *Lincoln Center's American Songbook* is provided by Richard L. Fisher, Amy & Joseph Perella and Sara & Maury Rosenberg.

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The Allen Room, Frederick P. Rose Hall

Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center

Note on the Program

by Barry Singer

Romance and defiance. Has anyone ever managed to meld these opposing signature postures of the American popular song more eloquently than Laura Nyro? She was a child prodigy wise beyond her years and a hippie chick timeless beyond her moment, a quintessential product of the '60s whose songwriting gift embraced everything and anything from Motown to madrigals, generating songs that do not seem to age at all.

The impossibility of pinpointing Nyro's design is at the heart of her music's magnetism. Born in the Bronx on October 18, 1947, she grew up listening to and seemingly absorbing virtually every musical flavor that New York City had to offer. By the time of her graduation from Manhattan's High School of Music and Art—in fact, well before graduation—she'd already fused these sounds into one wildly eclectic, yet exquisitely coherent musical voice.

Her first album, *More Than a New Discovery*, was released in 1967, when Nyro was barely 20 years old. Her second, *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession*, was acclaimed the following year as a creative benchmark for a musical era already packed with innovation (and self-congratulation). Genuinely poetic, accessible, yet disarmingly sophisticated, the record also delivered hit songs: "Sweet Blindness," "Eli's Comin'," and "Stoned Soul Picnic."

None of these hits were Nyro's, however, an oddity that would dog her entire career. Again and again on ensuing albums, great Laura Nyro songs—"Wedding Bell Blues," "Stoney End," "And When I Die," "Christmas in My Soul"—only hit the Top Ten after others recorded them: The Fifth Dimension, Barbra Streisand, or Blood, Sweat and Tears.

Alienated by the music business, and inclined to iconoclastic dramatic gestures, Nyro announced her retirement at the age of 24. She returned periodically over the next two decades for a handful of recordings and a few clusters of concert appearances before tragically succumbing to ovarian cancer in April of 1997. Her legacy today largely resides with the women singer/songwriters she inspired and influenced—directly or indirectly—two or three generations' worth, running from Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon through Rickie Lee Jones and Suzanne Vega to Alicia Keys and Norah Jones. Her own songs, though, remain transcendent.

Three-time Tony nominee Judy Kuhn won an Obie Award Off-Broadway in 2001 for her performance as a Nyro-esque character in *Eli's Comin'*, a musical derived from Nyro's songs.

"I'm not exactly the right age to have listened to her albums when they first came out," Kuhn admits, "but I also don't think, when I finally did hear them, I was ready for her. Now I am. So many of her songs sound improvised. It forces you to listen. And there was something deeply emotional and raw about her singing. I have to be very careful to get her voice out of my head in order to sing these songs. We're not dissimilar vocally. But we're also not the same."

In a notable career that continues to stretch from Broadway to the concert hall, Ms. Kuhn says the composers she has enjoyed singing the most, thus far, have been Joni Mitchell, Kurt Weill, Tom Waits, Stephen Sondheim, and Rodgers and Hart. It's an interesting group, diverse, and

seemingly unrelated. Put them all together, though, and they add up to Laura Nyro, in a sense. At least a good part of her.

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Meet the Artists

Judy Kuhn



Judy Kuhn has been nominated for three Tony Awards and three Drama Desk Awards for her work on Broadway in the Roundabout Theatre Company's hit revival of *She Loves Me*, the American premieres of *Chess* and *Les Misérables*, and *Rags*. Also on Broadway she appeared in Richard Nelson's play *Two Shakespearean Actors* (Lincoln Center Theater), Alan Menken and Tim Rice's *King David*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (New York Shakespeare Festival). Most recently she appeared in a new adaptation by Craig Lucas of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the INTIMAN Theatre directed by Bartlett Sher, and co-starred in the world premiere of Michael John LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow* at the Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia. She played Fosca in the critically acclaimed production of *Passion* at the Kennedy Center's Sondheim Celebration, and created the role of Betty Schaefer in the U.S. premiere of *Sunset Boulevard* in Los Angeles. In London's West End she starred in *Metropolis*, for which she received a Laurence Olivier Award nomination. Other theater credits include *Eli's Comin'* at the Vineyard Theatre (Obie Award), the title role in *The Ballad of Little Jo* at the Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Jeff Award nomination), *As Thousands Cheer* (Drama Dept.), *Dream True* (Vineyard Theatre), *Strike Up the Band* (City Center Encores!), *The Glass Menagerie* (McCarter Theatre), *The House of Martin Guerre* (Hartford Stage), and Martha Clarke's *Endangered Species* (BAM).

Ms. Kuhn sang the title role in Disney's *Pocahontas* as well as in the sequel *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World*. Her television appearances include *Hope & Faith* (ABC), *Law & Order* (NBC), *All My Children* (ABC), *The Secret Life of Mary Margaret...* (HBO), *My Favorite Broadway: The Leading Ladies* (PBS), *The Kennedy Center Honors* (CBS), *The Les Misérables 10th Anniversary Concert* (PBS), and *In Performance at the White House* (PBS).

Ms. Kuhn has performed on concert stages around the world, including appearances at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, London's Royal Albert Hall, and with Peter Nero and the Philly Pops Orchestra. She has performed her solo concert *Finding Home* for Lincoln Center's American Songbook series, and at Joe's Pub, the Kennedy Center, and the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia. She can be heard on numerous original cast recordings, as well as on her solo album, *Just in Time: Judy Kuhn Sings Jule Styne*.

Ms. Kuhn recently completed the feature film *Day on Fire*, in which she co-stars and performs the soundtrack with John Medeski.