

Phil Ochs - The Struggle Continues

April 12, 2010

Phil Ochs was, until his untimely death in 1976, one of the great American folksingers and songwriters, whose powerful lyrics — political and poetic — helped to inspire a generation. His sister Sonny Ochs has worked to keep Phil's memory and his message alive by organizing concerts bringing together current-day folk singers, offering a mix of their own material and Phil's. The Hurdy Gurdy Folk Music Club of New Jersey presented one of these concerts on April 10 and it was a real treat, both musically and politically.

The participating artists were Jen Cass, John Flynn, Greg Greenway, Kim and Reggie Harris, and Magpie (Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino).

John Flynn, introducing a powerful song he wrote about the Dover Air Force Base, where the bodies of US soldiers killed in action are brought, pointed out that we have to hold Obama to the same standard as we held George W. Bush.

Greg Greenway performed his "Standing on the Side of Love"; the title, he explained, comes from a line he heard at a concert in Virginia supporting same-sex marriage: when it comes right down to it, someone commented, I want to be standing on the side of love.

Jen Cass sang a moving tribute to Phil, "Standing in Your Memory," incorporating some of his own lyrics:

Too many martyrs and far too many dead,
Isn't that what you said? Somehow you let it be again
You became...another tragedy, a casualty of war
What were we fighting for if you Ain't Marching Anymore?

The HARRISES — who've written and perform an opera on the Underground Railroad, among many other musical creations — treated us to Reggie's virtuoso guitar-playing and Kim's vibrant and melodic voice.

And Magpie updated Phil's wonderful "Love Me, I'm A Liberal" (there are many shades of political opinion in the United States, Phil explained; and one of the shadiest of these is the liberal: 10 degrees to the left of center in good times, 10 degrees to the right of center when it affects them personally):

Love Me, I'm a Liberal
By Phil Ochs
updates by Greg Artzner & Terry Leonino

I cried when they shot Medgar Evers
The tears ran down my spine
And I cried when they shot Mr. Kennedy
As though I'd lost a father of mine
But Malcolm X got what was coming

He got what he asked for that time
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I went to civil rights rallies
And I put down the old D.A.R.
I love Oprah and Michael and Tiger
I hope every black kid becomes a star
But don't talk about revolution
That's going a little bit too far
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I cheered when Obama was chosen
My faith in the system restored
And I'm glad that they caught Bernie Madoff
He certainly got his reward
And I love Pakistanis and Arabs
As long as they don't move next door
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

Those crazies who joined the tea parties
Should all hang their heads in shame
Now I can't understand how their minds work
Way too much Glenn Beck on the brain
But if you want socialized health care
You must be terminally insane
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I read MoveOn.org and Progressive
I've learned to take every view
I watch Bill Maher and Jon Stewart
And I laugh all the way to the loo
But when it comes to the war on terror
There's no one more red, white and blue
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

I vote for the Democratic Party
Though I'm sure that Kucinich is wrong
I attend all the Pete Seeger concerts
He still gets me singing those songs
And I'll send all my money to Haiti
But don't ask me to come on along
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

Once I was young and impulsive
I wore every conceivable pin
Now it's causes on Facebook and Twitter
Virtual marches and sit-ins
Ah, but I've grown older and wiser
And that's why I'm turning you in (to the department of homeland security)
So love me, love me, love me, I'm a liberal

If you have a chance to catch any of these performers, don't miss them. And be on the look-out for the next Phil Ochs Song Night!