

THE ARK & FORD MOTOR COMPANY FUND PRESENT

A MICHIGAN TRIBUTE TO

NANCI GRIFFITH

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THE RFD BOYS

A Michigan Tribute to Nanci Griffith

Thank you for joining us as we remember and celebrate singer, songwriter, poet, musical mentor and collaborator, and The Ark's dear friend: Nanci Griffith. Nanci's light shone brightly at The Ark and on the Michigan music scene for nearly 30 years, as it did around the world. She was as luminous as her music, and a wonderful mix of what some called contradictions that were actually her rich and loamy creative soil: softspoken and outspoken, earthy and ethereal, serious and playful. Her voice could reflect anything and everything, traveling from a little girl's whisper to a full-throated rebel yell. We loved her for all of it.

We had planned to dedicate the 45th Ann Arbor Folk Festival to Nanci, with her Michigan Tribute video capping off two nights of live performance in the University of Michigan's Hill Auditorium. But the Covid-19 pandemic intervened, as it often has over the last two years. Based on the current direction and impact of the Omicron variant, we made the difficult decision to cancel this year's Folk Fest.

Although we're disappointed not to be able to present the festival this year, we're glad to have this gem to share with you. Nanci loved the Michigan music scene—the talented community of artists; the knowledgeable and hugely responsive audiences; The Ark, which she considered her musical home. She would be so happy to hear these Michigan-rooted artists bringing their own voices and interpretations to her music. We're deeply grateful to them for sharing their time and talent to join us in celebrating Nanci's artistry and spirit. Thanks also to our longtime Presenting Sponsor Ford Motor Company Fund for their continued investment in The Ark, its mission, and our community. To Ford, Q LTD, Rave Associates, and all our corporate partners: thank you for your support and your vital impact on The Ark's mission of enriching human spirits through the power of music.

A shout out to The Ark's volunteers, who are second to none. They make the organization's work possible and have kept The Ark operating since reopening in late August. We can't thank them enough for their work and dedication. Thanks also to our members, who have been incredibly generous throughout the pandemic. And to all of you music lovers, thanks for making it clear throughout the uncertainty of the Covid pandemic that music supports you and you support music, in all the ways The Ark has been sharing it with you.

Making the decision to cancel the Folk Fest prompted this reflection from one of The Ark's Board members: "This is tough, but we'll get through it and the Ann Arbor Folk Festival will ride again." Indeed. In the meantime, this year the Ann Arbor Folk Fest's spirit rides on the wings of the immortal Nanci Griffith, lifted up by the voices of Michigan artists.

There's a pale sky in the east, all the stars are in the west
Oh, here's to all the dreamers, may our open hearts find rest
The wing and the wheel are gonna carry us along
And we'll have memories for company, long after the songs are sung.

--Nanci Griffith

Here's to Nanci, and all the dreamers.



Marianne James
Executive Director
The Ark



Anya Siglin
Program Director
The Ark

Nanci Griffith: 1953-2021

A Longtime Love Affair

Nanci Griffith first lit up Michigan in 1985, starting with a set in the Ann Arbor Folk Festival in January, followed by popular demand with shows at The Ark in March and December. For nearly 30 years she graced The Ark stage with memorable performances, including an intimate benefit concert with Billy Joe Shaver and the Cash Brothers in 2003 and an unforgettable evening with Maura O'Connell, John Gorka and the Chenille Sisters at The Ark's 40-Year Fling in 2005. She appeared five times in the Ann Arbor Folk Festival, headlining the 20th and 25th Folk Fests in 1997 and 2002, respectively. Along the way she became a dear friend. She loved Ann Arbor and the Michigan music scene and considered The Ark her musical home. Though no one knew it at the time, her performance at The Ark in March of 2013 was her last show before retiring. Pete Kennedy, Nanci's long-time accompanist (and with his wife, Maura, member of the Blue Moon Orchestra), shared this reflection with us:



The Ark's 40 Year Fling - photo by Andrew Rogers

“ The show we played with Nanci in March of 2013 was special for a number of reasons...Nanci was totally relaxed, feeling like she was “home.” After the show, I was in my dressing room and Nanci walked by. She stopped and ducked her head in, with a big smile, and said “Pete, that show was FANTASTIC!” I was stunned, because in twenty years I had never heard her say anything like that after a show.

...[T]hat was her last real show. She might have done a few sitting in type things in Nashville later on, but The Ark was the last full length show, and she loved it.

I just wanted you to know how special The Ark was to her, and how she felt that [the Siglin family] was family to her...that she was in a safe place where she could be herself, where her artistry could really blossom, as it did that night.

I know her fans wanted her to keep going forever, but if it was fate that she was to play a final show and then retire from the stage, it's fitting that The Ark is where that happened.

”

The love was mutual.

Exceptional Artistry

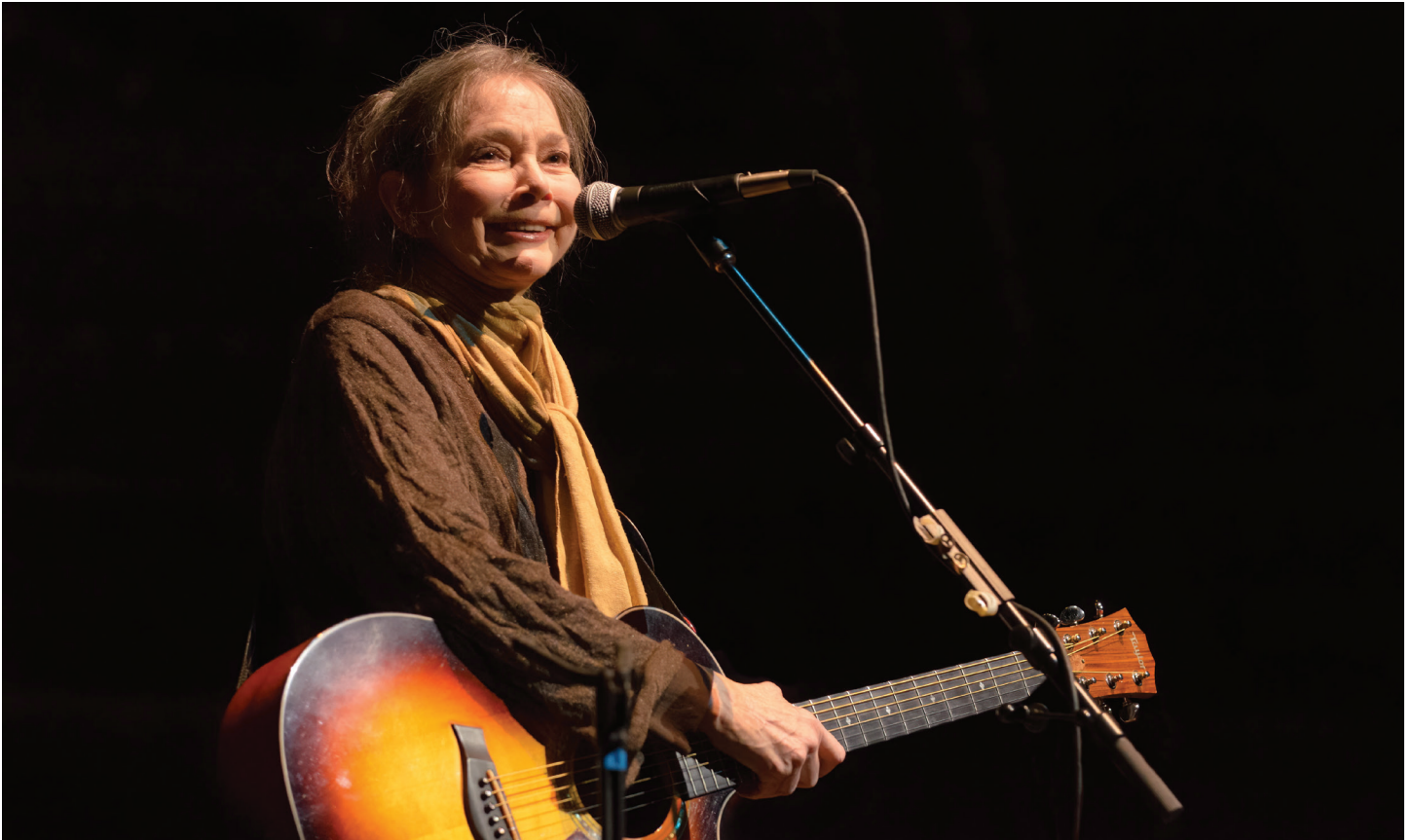
Michigan could never get enough of Nanci, but more than quantity, we celebrate the quality of her music and the spirit she shared in her performances. Her songs are mostly portraits, and each one is fully filled out with details that fit, and that reveal the deep resonances of human lives. She brought a poetry to small-town Texas life that shone with beauty and celebrated human resilience.

Nanci grew up in Austin and played her first professional show there at the age of 14. One of her models was Loretta Lynn, whom she admired as a young woman because she sang and played the guitar. She also admired Buddy Holly and Odetta, and seeing the young Townes Van Zandt put her on the path to music. Nanci won the Kerrville Folk Festival's New Folk Competition in 1978. When she got started, women songwriters weren't common on the Texas folk scene, but Nanci changed all that. She signed with the Rounder label's Philo imprint and released *There's a Light Beyond These Woods* in 1978.

With 1984's *Once in a Very Blue Moon*, Nanci Griffith hit her stride. Every song on the album was a finely etched little story, but we take a moment now to listen to her quietly lyrical version of “Roseville Fair”—the song was composed by Bill Staines, whom we also mourn this year. Most of Nanci's songs were originals, but she had a knack for covers chosen

well at just the right time. Her 1987 album *Lone Star State of Mind* brought Julie Gold's "From a Distance" into view before, a few years later, Bette Midler took it everywhere. That song marked the beginning of a turn toward social and political themes in Nanci's music, at first general and later more pointed and specific.

Nanci's songs were eagerly awaited by artists on the more literate side of country music, and songs like "Love at the Five and Dime" (recorded by Kathy Mattea) and "Outbound Plane" (recorded by Suzy Bogguss) are country classics. Sometimes she called her music folkabilly, and she could rock out on occasion; at other times she turned toward adult contemporary sounds. But almost always the story was the thing. When a woman's singing career begins as she leaves her husband driving a Ford Econoline, you are right there with her as she drives from Salt Lake City to the California coastline, with a voice like wine.



35th Ann Arbor Folk Festival - photo by Andrew Rogers

A Lasting Legacy

Nanci's *Other Voices, Other Rooms* album of 1993 took the Grammy award for Best Contemporary Folk Album; it was a tribute to the songwriters who inspired her, from Kate Wolf to Pat Metheny. She in turn has inspired many of the younger songwriters who take to The Ark's stage today. She loved the community that musical collaboration creates and was a cheerleader and champion for her fellow artists, whether long-established or just starting out. At each Ann Arbor Folk Fest she played you could find her stationed backstage, watching and listening to every set throughout the evening. Once she drove from Nashville to The Ark to attend a performance of her friend and mentor, Odetta. No one who was there will forget the moment when Odetta called her onstage to join the encore.

Each of Nanci's appearances in Ann Arbor brought new music, and we felt like we had front row seats at her creative process. The message she left when she signed the wall backstage at The Ark: "*Sing out, sing loud, for Pete's sake.*" We miss her terribly and are deeply thankful for her life, her music, and her friendship.

In Memoriam

Each year as Folk Festival approaches, we at The Ark think of the long parade of musicians who have made the club what it is, and we take a moment to reflect on the ones we lost over the past year—the creative figures who’ve played The Ark, appeared at the Folk Festival, or just helped shape the genres that nurture the club and its audiences. This year, as we’ve learned how fragile the whole ecosystem of live music can be, each loss feels especially poignant. We dedicate this program to the memory of Nanci Griffith, an inspiration to countless figures in the rich musical soil of Texas country-folk music.

This year we mark the passing of some of folk music’s founding greats, people integral to the entire genre as it is known today. We lost Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains this year. The Chieftains never played The Ark, which was already too small for them by the time the club got going, but we co-sponsored their appearance at Hill Auditorium with the U-M Office of Major Events. People think of Irish folk music as a timeless presence, but in fact its vast reach today is largely the result of Paddy’s revivalist work, beginning with his stint in the band of Seán Ó Riada. The subtle songs and warm humor of Bill Staines graced the Ark stage many times, and he was a true folk classic. Bodhran player and vocalist Robin Morton was a founder of the Boys of the Lough in the late 1960s and played with them many times at The Ark. George Frayne founded Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen in 1967; the group played a memorable show at The Ark in 2001. Longtime Ann Arborites will remember Pat Reynolds, a.k.a. Maggie Reynolds, part-owner of Mark’s Coffee House on William St. in the 1960s; she sang with our former program director Dave Siglin at The Ark in the early years. Fiddler Byron Berline was a key figure in progressive bluegrass music, well known to local audiences, and he played The Ark with the trio Berline/Hickman/Crary, making chambergrass before there was such a thing. We were lucky enough to present the songwriter Joanne Shenandoah once at The Ark; she was a key forerunner of the present Renaissance in Native American songwriting. The bluesy soul-folk singer-songwriter Ellen McIlwaine was a stalwart of the 1960s Greenwich Village folk scene in New York who played with, among others, Jimi Hendrix. Another Greenwich Village veteran was Patrick Sky, a singer-songwriter of Irish and Native American descent who wrote the Buffy Sainte-Marie classic “Many a Mile.” Maine’s Captain Kendall Morse was a humorist and one of the earlier contributors to the tradition of storytelling shows that has developed at The Ark. Folksinger Mike Rivers performed with Andy Wallace and Jon Eberhardt at The Ark as the Ring Shouters in the 1970s; Mike went on to mix sound and recordings for the Smithsonian Institution. As David Bromberg’s longtime bassist, Tony Markellis played The Ark many times. And we cosponsored a show by Monkee Michael Nesmith in Royal Oak, just a few years before his untimely death.

And we mark the deaths of many artists whom we never featured at The Ark, but maybe should have. We lost Don Everly, and he influenced every single person who has ever sung duo harmonies on The Ark’s stage. The great banjoists J.D. Crowe and Sonny Osborne (of the Osborne Brothers) were well loved even among young bluegrass musicians, and Tom T. Hall was nonpareil among serious country songwriters. Most of the jazz artists who have appeared at The Ark have looked to Chick Corea as an inspiration, and the same is true of Bunny Wailer for any artist with a reggae tinge. The jazz organist Dr. Lonnie Smith did many memorable shows in the Detroit area, and the songs of Dave Frishberg continue to resonate in the jazz world. Graeme Edge of the Moody Blues influenced poetic rock songwriting down to the present day, and where would music in southeastern Michigan have been without Mary Wilson of the Supremes and Wanda Young of the Marvelettes? And the rancheras of Vicente Fernández still crowd every Mexican restaurant jukebox.

We at The Ark carry out a balancing act. We are a key link in the chain that introduces new music to American audiences, and indeed that’s part of what the Ann Arbor Folk Festival is about. Yet we are keenly aware of our role as tradition bearers, and each year we pause in memory of those who built the tradition we live in.

Performers

The Accidentals with Kim Richey, Maia Sharp, Beth Nielsen Chapman, and The Burney Sisters

One of the most heartening developments we've seen lately is that Michigan's young folk sensations The Accidentals have been writing and performing with some of our favorite songwriters who've appeared at The Ark down through the years. It makes us feel like we're doing something right in cultivating this tradition. For our Michigan Tribute to Nanci Griffith, The Accidentals appear with veteran Nashville songsmiths Kim Richey and Beth Nielsen Chapman, Californian Maia Sharp (who wrote the Dixie Chicks' "Home"), and in tonight's show a new group of up-and-comers, Missouri's Burney Sisters.

Annie & Rod Capps

Drawing on three decades of performing and learning, Annie & Rod Capps offer a little something for everyone in their songs. Annie's lyrics, she says, "are a shameless exposé of her own doubts, fears, and desires, with inner revelations that speak clearly to the masses." They have a sweet, wry perspective, and guitarist Rod brings a warm, funky groove. Fearless Michigan road warriors, Annie & Rod have earned a passel of Detroit Music Award nominations and awards, and their music has hints of everything from bluegrass to jazz to rock.

Chris Buhalis

Chris Buhalis was born and raised on Detroit's east side, but his songs come from places you can only find if you stick out your thumb and follow fate's lead. Covering territory from Alaska's whiskey-soaked bars to the spark- and steel-filled auto plants of Detroit, Chris, much like Nanci Griffith, writes songs that speak of real people in real situations. Chris has appeared on radio's *Acoustic Cafe* and shared stages with the likes of David Bromberg, Catie Curtis, and Dave Van Ronk. *Current* praises Chris Buhalis for "beautiful, effortless Americana as honest and gently insightful as any you've heard," and if you haven't heard this institution of Michigan songwriting yet, tonight would be a great time!

Dave Boutette & Kristi Lynn Davis

Dave Boutette's Midwest is full of passion, humor, and a certain shaky grace. Influenced by songwriters from Chuck Berry to John Prine to Elvis Costello, he documents the travels and triumphs of life in the heartland. Now he's performing with Kristi Lynn Davis, who logged about 240,000 kicks as a Radio City Rockette. Kristi's had so many adventures in show business, she had to write a book to keep them all straight. Her award-winning comic memoir is titled *Long Legs and Tall Tales*. Kristi's voice slips in right beside Dave's, and her charming and confident stage presence, along with her quick wit, are adding a whole new appeal to Dave's shows.

Dick Siegel & Dave Keeney

Dick Siegel never loses an edge that ranges from wry to sharp. Dick won the Best New Folk Artist award at the Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, and he's inspired plenty of songwriters in Michigan and beyond. Ranging from jump blues and Buddy Holly-style pop to folk balladry and new folk lyricism, Dick's songs earned him a place on WDET's list of the most important and influential artists in the history of Detroit, alongside legends such as John Lee Hooker, Stevie Wonder, and Aretha Franklin. "I'm celebratory—I celebrate life from the huge to the minute, from the tragic to the hilarious," he explains. On tonight's tribute, Dick appears with dobroist and guitarist Dave Keeney.

Performers

Jen Sygit

Lansing singer-songwriter Jen Sygit (rhymes with “dig it”) has gained airplay and lots of fans around Michigan with a pleasantly bluesy sound that carries forward influences from Gillian Welch, Patty Griffin, Bonnie Raitt, and Lucinda Williams. In 2020 she released *It’s About Time*, produced by longtime friend and collaborator Dominic John Davis (bassist to Jack White, Buddy Miller, North Mississippi Allstars, Joshua Davis). It’s a collection of original songs that takes the listener on an eclectic journey, drawing influences from a cross section of middle America, from Gulf Shore sands to the Great Lakes basin. She’s a kindred spirit to Nanci Griffith, and a musician on the rise!

London Beck

We first heard up-and-comer London Beck last summer when we were putting together a program for the 2021 Ann Arbor Art Fair. Beck is a singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer who has been headlining at local venues like the Blind Pig and Ypsi Pride. Their music draws influence from across the musical spectrum, including soul, jazz, pop, and hip-hop. As a singer, songwriter, producer/composer, engineer, and multi-instrumentalist, Beck stands out among a new generation of creatives who are not only able to record and perform, but have a hand in every aspect of the creation of their storytelling soundscapes. Every release by Beck provides a glimpse into their thoughts on the future of the industry.

The Lucky Nows

The Lucky Nows play dynamic, high-energy Americana folk-rock with echoes of Isbell and Isakov and a bluesy center. Their music draws from every genre, delivering a wide range of lyric-driven originals with intricate arrangements and gorgeous harmonies. If Steve Earle had a love child with Lucinda Williams, and that child was raised by Kris Delmhurst and Jeffrey Foucault, and frequently visited by Shovels & Rope and the ghost of Townes Van Zandt, this person’s debut CD would sound eerily similar to The Lucky Nows’ *Rise*. The Lucky Nows feature Detroiters Jen Cass on vocals.

Matt Watroba

Matt Watroba is the kind of guy who makes friends easily. Not only is he on a first-name basis with most of the major folk musicians in North America after a few decades of sharing stages with them, but he also has the kind of rapport with audiences that makes them feel as if they’re sitting among friends in a living room. A longtime folk radio host as well as a songwriter, Matt founded the Michigan Community Sings a few years back (maybe we can get back to those one of these days!). He’s a Michigan folk institution whose ties to The Ark go way back, and it’s fitting to have him on board along with his wife, Kim, as we memorialize Nanci Griffith.

May Erlewine

Some people might call May Erlewine “Michigan’s songbird,” but her songs have traveled far beyond her home state. One of the most prolific and passionate songwriters of her generation, May writes songs that have touched the hearts of people all over the world. Her words have held solace for weary hearts, offered a light in the darkness, and held a lot of space for the pain and joy of being alive in these times. Growing up in an eclectic, music-infused, homeschool environment, May played in punk bands, train-jumped, and hitchhiked across the U.S. when she was a teenager, and later settled down on a farm in Michigan. Her stories and songs are captivating and relatable, and when she starts to sing, there’s nothing better.

Performers

Nadim Azzam

Nadim Azzam brings his passion as a lyricist, MC, guitarist, and soul singer to our Nanci Griffith tribute. This young Ann Arborite built a name with his heartfelt, rap-laced solo acoustic set, and has been amassing a national following in love with his rapid-fire hip-hop delivery fused with the sincerity of a 1950s love song balladeer. His original music is a hip-hop–alt-rock–jazz fusion that uplifts and inspires, bringing that smile-worthy element found in Ed Sheeran, Michael Franti, and G Love & Special Sauce. His powerful debut EP, *Here's to Changes Vol. 1*, landed him a nationwide campus tour with Matisyahu, and he premiered much of the music from his full-length debut album last year on The Ark's Family Room series.

The RFD Boys

It's hard to believe, because each show is fresh and new, but The RFD Boys have been delighting Michigan audiences since 1969 with their fabulous musicianship and sly, exquisitely timed between-song humor. They're legends of Michigan bluegrass, but they're more than that, too. With an appearance on the cover of *Bluegrass Unlimited*, with songs recorded by the likes of the Country Gentlemen, and with performances alongside bluegrass greats like Bill Monroe and Ralph Stanley, the RFD Boys are a part of America's bluegrass tradition. The RFD Boys are one of southeastern Michigan's most durable musical ensembles, and their shows capture a deep slice of musical Ann Arbor. They recently released a new album, *Still Delivering*, for their 50th anniversary, and it was at that anniversary celebration that they were finally named The's Ark's *official* house band!

Rochelle Clark

Michigan native Rochelle Clark's music has been described as raw, honest, and beautifully vulnerable. She writes and sings about real life, joy, struggle and human tragedy—as with Nanci Griffith, you can't help but feel for the characters in her songs. Leaning heavily on personal experience, she connects on an intimate level that resonates with her audience. As one-half of the acclaimed Americana duo The Potter's Field, Rochelle is a powerful vocalist who has been captivating audiences in Michigan and throughout the Midwest for years. Drawing on roots in folk, Americana, and country, Rochelle has found a sound that is uniquely her own.

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Our deepest thanks go out to The Ark Board of Directors and our family of Ark Volunteers working throughout the year.

The Ark Mission Statement

The Ark is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the enrichment of the human spirit through the presentation, preservation and encouragement of folk, roots and ethnic music and related arts. The Ark provides a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all people to listen to, learn about, perform, and share music.

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