

Karla Bonoff lives among us but it's her music that's all around us.

Karla Bonoff appears Friday night at the Lobero Theatre in a benefit for the Santa Barbara Zoo

By ANDREA ESTRADA
South Coast Beacon

October 10, 2002

Ventura County Star

Her passion for four-footed creatures extends well beyond the domesticated among us, however.

A behind-the-scenes tour of the Santa Barbara Zoo piqued her interest in all things wild, and she decided to make her performance this Friday a benefit for the zoo.

"The tour was fresh in my mind when we decided to do the show," she explained.

She chose the Lobero as the venue for her concert because "to me it seemed like the perfect spot not just because of its history but because of its size and it's perfect for acoustic music."

Bonoff will take the stage at 8 p.m. with Kenny Edwards, her longtime musical partner in the group Bryndle and a master of the guitar, bass and mandolin. Edwards and Bonoff joined with Wendy Waldman and Andrew Gold in the early 1970s to form Bryndle, a band that re-united in the mid-'90s.

Bonoff moved to Santa Barbara from Los Angeles five years ago and enjoys her new digs.

"I started coming up in 1997 and I moved into a new house in 2000," she said. "When my L.A. neighborhood started to change I decided it was time to move."

Bonoff has come a long way since her early days in music, when she lined up to play Monday nights at the Troubadour in 1969 and rubbed elbows with the likes of James Taylor, Jackson Browne and Elton John. Since then, recording artists such as Linda Ronstadt, Bonnie Raitt, the Eagles, Wynonna and Aaron Neville have made Bonoff's songs their own, performing them on stage and in the studio.

In 1974, Ronstadt recorded Bonoff's "Someone To Lay Down Beside Me," "Lose Again" and "If He's Ever Near" on her *Hasten Down the Wind* album. Nearly 15 years later, Ronstadt and Neville recorded "All My Life," which won the Grammy for best vocal performance by a duo or a group.

Raitt recorded "Home," and when Wynonna sang "Tell Me Why" on her second album, Bonoff played acoustic guitar and Bryndle members provided the backup vocals.

"It's always exciting to have great artists do your songs," said Bonoff, although she admits she feels something akin to what Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to as "alienated majesty" when she hears her words and music coming from someone else's mouth.

"It's kind of like it's part of your family and then you have to let it go off and live on its own. I've been lucky to have really good artists do my songs so I haven't really experienced anything bad."

Bonoff began playing the guitar and writing songs when she was 15 years old, and although she has plenty of experience and the respect of her peers, the creative process hasn't gotten any easier for her.

"It's 95 percent sweat and 5 percent inspiration," she explained. "It's bringing your physical body to it and working through it. You have to show up for the job. Sometimes it's really tedious."

She sets very high standards for her work and often intimidates herself with her own demands.

"I want things to be great immediately," she said.

Because Bonoff writes so much from the heart, producing a song sometimes takes her on a journey to the darkest recesses of her soul, a place to which she doesn't always want to go.

"When you write from a deep place you have to be vulnerable and you tend to resist going there because it can be painful or uncomfortable," she said. "It's like people trying to resist having heart-to-heart talks even though they need to."

Often she can't immediately identify the spring from which a particular tune flows but discovers much later where it resided in her psyche.

"The thing about songwriting that's so wonderful is the magical element. They're out there floating around and if your channel is open you can bring them through you and to paper," she said.

"From a very intellectual level, I don't understand it but it seems these things come from a deeper place. They don't seem to be about me at the time but I look at them years later and say, 'Oh, now I understand that.'"

For Bonoff, the melodies usually come first in the writing process and the lyrics follow.

"I've always been a music person. The music is what moves me to the words. Finding the words has always been harder. Sometimes I'll have complete melodies before I'll have any lyrics at all."

