

Joyce Johnson Rouse:

Crooning for the Earth in Nashville and Beyond

By Linda Bryant

Joyce Johnson Rouse is not only a familiar face at the Nashville Friends Meeting, she's a familiar voice.

A singer-songwriter based in a town where tunesmiths practically flow through the water pipes,

Year after year, she's been a melodic spark for the Nashville Friends Meeting. The strongest example of this can be seen during December when she leads caroling in the community and is the main force behind popular Christmas Eve services.

Rouse changed the way she was doing music a decade ago

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after receiving leadings that inspired her to use her music to educate people about the environment.

She began performing under the name of **Earth Mama**, and even trademarked the name as a performing artist.

Of course, she pens songs with varying themes, but they almost always have a central message that all things are connected, that if we find that still small voice of God inside our actions will be tipped towards justice, love, reconciliation and right action.

Edmund Davis, who attends Nashville Friends Meeting, likens Rouse to a creature of the sea.

"She possesses a purity of heart and vision that comes through in the songs," Davis said.

"Her joy reminds me of a dolphin at play. Singing seems to come as easy to her as squeals of delight come to a dolphin."

Quaker practice, with its devotion to silence and opening as a quiet channel for messages that are meant for others, is a powerful songwriting tool, Rouse believes.

"I'm just an instrument through which the music plays," she says. "The creative spirit

moves me to draw from everything I hear and see."

More and more, Rouse's sweet, strong voice can be heard beyond the small Nashville Friends Meeting, which on a peak Sunday is attended by about fifty worshippers.

With over eighty recordings bearing her writer credits, she has had songs recorded by Maureen McGovern, Marie Osmond, Jennifer McCarter and the McCarter Sisters, Wild Rose, Jana Stanfield, Lindy Gravelle and others.

Her songs have been featured in movies and on syndicated environmental and activist radio programs around the world, and used extensively in educational venues and by international environmental and peace organizations such as the Food



Rouse is distinctive not only because she's a practicing Quaker, but because she uses her music to raise awareness about the ecology and the environment.

Rouse's musical career is a ministry to the earth, not just in Nashville, but also all over the globe.

Still, when she's not touring in the United States or Europe, Rouse is often in front of the old piano at Nashville's Meeting House leading Friends in pre-meeting hymns, sing-a-longs and chants.

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and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNESCO, and International Earth Charter. Her commercial jingles and theme songs have been featured in a National Park celebration, historic preservation projects and family festivals.

Rouse was also lead, heart first, to a pursue Masters degree in Earth Literacy from Indiana's St. Mary of the Woods College. She received her graduate degree in 2002.

"It was not so much a decision, as my soul telling me that this gift of music — and the years I had spent honing the crafts of songwriting and wordsmithing — were intended to be used for something bigger than 'OOO, I need you baby' or 'You broke my heart' songs," Rouse says.

"I've been an advocate for many progressive environmental stands and issues since my youth," she continues. "I was spending a great deal of time on eco-activism and on music, but never realized that combining them might be possible. Prayer, meditation and long, honest conversations with myself led me down this path."

In 1995, Rouse's song "Standing On The Shoulders" was chosen to be the theme song for the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in Washington, D.C. She receives many requests from organizations that want to use the song to honor their local leaders, graduates and retirees.

"We've gotten so many requests to use "Standing On The Shoulders" for events that we've made sheet music available in two different arrangements," Rouse said. "This is a fulfillment of a dream. My songs are being used to move and inspire people to greater heights of service, and lead more people to care for our earth."

Woven in and out of Rouse's performances, speeches and public appearances is the slogan "*Helping Heal The Planet One Song At A Time.*"

She is often asked if she really believes songs can heal the planet.

"My belief is that God can heal anything," Rouse insists. "We live in a world very much in need of healing — people, families, habitats, faith communities, eco-systems, nations, the ozone layer... the list goes on.

"Over the years, people have been moved to greater faith by music. People have used music to march into battle, to strive for equality, to be paid fair wages for their work — all kinds of music from classical to folk. I believe that songs can be powerful tools to nurture and encourage both action and a depth of understanding about important ideas. Every great social movement has marched to the strains of its own music."

New concepts and ideas are learned more easily through music, Rouse reasons.

"Our generation suffers from information overload. Because

our brains are so full of technical knowledge and trivia, we have lost a great deal of practical Earth-basic knowledge, or Earth Literacy. Songs are melodies with a message attached — and they have a way of getting inside of you and sticking. Only by re-learning and respecting the critical basics of living in harmony with nature can we hope to continue the human race and live sustainably on the planet."

2005 promises to be a lively year for Rouse, perhaps her busiest ever. She'll be in Europe giving concerts on behalf of Earth Charter education and releasing her seventh CD.

A self-professed cheerleader for the Earth Charter, Rouse is on a mission to get others to read and adopt it.

"If you are not familiar with it, finish reading this, then go directly to www.earthcharterusa.org. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200! Read it, absorb it and spread the word to others."

About the author

Linda Bryant has attended Nashville Friends Meeting since August 2001. She is a staff writer at *The Tennessean*, Nashville's daily newspaper.

For more about Joyce Rouse:

Joyce is available for concerts, workshops, school trainings, keynote addresses, performances and speeches. Learn more about her at www.earthmama.org