

# Catching up with Judy Collins



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Judy Collins has tapped into her own fountain of youth -- and it's a potent mixture of creative passion, brown-bag lunches and vintage Jane Fonda videos.

Next month, at the dynamic age of 72, the folk chanteuse and rock 'n' roll muse will be releasing a memoir, a new album and her second children's book. She's fitting those events into a schedule packed with tour dates, two of which are at Astoria's Liberty Theatre on Sept. 17 and 18.

In a recent phone interview, Collins talked about her latest projects, maintaining her serenity, and all of that glorious hair, which is still kept long with silvery tendrils curling around the same startling blue eyes that launched a legendary love song by Crosby, Stills and Nash.

**Oct. 18 is a very big day -- you have not only a second children's book and new album being released, but a memoir, as well. Surely you've been approached before to publish your story, so why did you choose to wait until now?**

You know, you get to certain points in your life and you think, "Well, now's the time." I'm going to be celebrating 50 years in the business -- I signed my contract with Elektra Records 50 years ago this year -- and I thought, "It's time for me to get this all down on paper while I can still find all the notebooks and the datebooks and look at the Google and talk to old friends."

**Speaking of old friends, obviously some well-known people will make appearances in your memoir. Did you encounter resistance from anyone in telling your story?**

Oh no. I said some things that are true, things that are often backed up by public record. I repeated only my own experience, and you can't get around that, if you've known someone well. One of the reasons I called it "Sweet Judy Blue Eyes" was that because, even after all these years, Stephen Stills and I remain friends -- and that was another thing to celebrate.

**Many artists and creative people struggle with emotional extremes and depression, and you've been very open about your own issues with those things. Is that something you address in your memoir, as well?**

Very much. I talk about the black dog; I talk about the depression. The reason I exercise, for instance, is that I learned early in my 20s that that was one of the ways to deal with suicidal thoughts and depression.

You know, it's sort of a default position because I'm not going to take drugs. I'm sober 33 years, and I don't take any antidepressants or mood-altering chemicals.

**So on the new album "Bohemian," you worked with both Joni Mitchell and songwriter Jimmy Webb. What's the theme of this record, and how does it differ from your previous albums?**

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I wanted "Bohemian" to reflect what I went through musically, so "Cactus Tree" is on it, "Campo De Encino" is on it, and then my brand-new song about my mother, who just died in December, so it kind of pulls together the present, the future and the past.

**Let's talk about the children's books and albums -- "Over the Rainbow" did so well, and now you're releasing a second, "When You Wish Upon A Star." What is it about making music for kids that you**

**enjoy? Is there a different mindset when you go in to record for children?**

Not at all. There's a version of "When You Wish Upon A Star" that's very simple, me and the piano -- so fundamentally, it's what I do for everybody. But the difference is, then I go to bookstores and do signings for children, and I have such a good time. They're so eager; they love to sing. It's just a fantastic experience.

**What keeps your creative engine going?**

I have a very, very long history with the music, with my own songwriting process, with my concerts. And I've always been a touring artist; I think there might have been a few months in 1977 when I didn't tour, but that's it. And I've always made records, dozens and dozens of records.

**And it seems that the quality of your voice is still so strong. In fact, I remember hearing you on NPR's "Wait Wait ... Don't Tell Me!" recently, and they introduced you by saying that you've been "making music as long as Keith Richards but you look way better," and it's true. Aside from good genes, do you have a specific routine that keeps you and your voice in shape?**

Oh God, yes. I exercise every day -- including sometimes the Jane Fonda (videos)! I'm always amused when I call her or talk to her, 'cause I'm still doing that first routine as part of my cross-training. And I swim and I get on the treadmill. I don't eat any sugar or any grains or potatoes because they set up a craving for me, and I don't want that. I carry my food most of the time. That's my second assault plan.

I also have a wonderful team that I work with. I have a musical director who travels with me and a sound man, so he keeps my voice in health. And I'm married to a great man -- we've been together 33 years.

**And while we're on the subject of taking care of yourself, something a bit more superficial: Your hair is just gorgeous. Many women feel the need to cut theirs off as they get older. ... How do you maintain it?**

I used to have somebody on the road with me but now I do it all myself. I have a hairdresser I've worked with since 1964, and I've never cut it since then -- well, I have the ends trimmed from time to time. But it has to be washed and dried and it takes me a long time; it's like having a pet.

**Children's books, albums, a memoir, touring -- are there any mountains left for you to climb?**

I have a lot of things I'm interested in doing. They involve creative efforts, writing more songs, structured in a way that may be different than albums.

And my touring seems to get more extensive. I recorded on this new album with Shawn Colvin and (folk group) Ollabelle, so I imagine we'll do concert dates or something with them. You've got to juggle things and learn to do things, to reinvent yourself all the time, which I've never stopped doing.