Joan Baez: a tribute as activist heads for 80, her voice now 'weathered with soul'

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Even since appearing unannounced at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival, Joan Baez has held a unique position in music history.

Not only were there best selling albums and a voice described "as husky and rich as old gold," but she also "vividly championed the early career of then boyfriend Bob Dylan. And her consistent support for peace and social justice placed her at pivotal moments in the standing on the Lincoln Memorial with Martin Luther King singing "We Shall Overcome," or playing Woodstock pregnant.

Muswell Hill journalist Liz Thomson has loved Baez's voice ever since hearing her at Finsbury Park's Rainbow Theatre. "It was a fantastic concert, I thought it would be the only time I would hear her but it turned out not to be the case". Now Thomson hopes to do justice to a perhaps overlooked artist, who turns 80 in January, with Joan Baez: The Last Leaf (Palazzo £14.99).

Drawing on interviews with friends, colleagues and personal conversations, Thomson who has co-edited anthologies on Lennon and Bowie and is revising Robert Shelton's classic Dylan biography No Direction Home, says: "Listening to her records was fascinating...I turned a corner with her."

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