



Adam, Margie (b. 1949)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Margie Adam was in her early twenties when the women's liberation movement rocked the United States, and a lesbian feminist culture began to develop. A lesbian, a feminist, and a passionate musician, Adam became part of creating a new political music genre that celebrated lesbian love and the changing lives of women.

A pioneer in women's music, she became one of the first feminists to found her own record company, while becoming a well-known performer on the concert circuit of women's coffeehouses and music festivals that sprouted in communities across the country during the 1970s.

In the decades that followed, Adam has continued to write and perform her music, a synthesis of folk, pop, blues, and classical. Though her music is often ethereal, she has also clung firmly to her belief in the importance of political activism. As she said to Fay Jacobs in an interview in *Letters from Camp Rehoboth*, "I am very interested to explore the intersections of activism and spirituality through culture, but I am fundamentally a feminist singer-songwriter-activist. When I hear myself identified in those terms, I am standing on solid ground."

Adam was born in the southern California town of Lompoc on February 7, 1949, and learned to play the piano while still a young child. In 1973, she attended a feminist music festival organized by writer Kate Millett at Sacramento State University. During the "open mike" period, Adam, terrified, but bolstered by the supportive energy of the women around her, gathered her courage and performed onstage for the first time.

In 1974, Adam's career took a leap forward at the National Women's Music Festival in Champaign/Urbana, Illinois. Several young feminist musicians were included in the festival, but the main stage on Saturday night was reserved for the "big name" performers, Roberta Flack and Yoko Ono, both of whom cancelled at the last minute. Organizers asked for help, and several lesbian musicians stepped in. Meg Christian, Cris Williamson, Vicki Randle, and Margie Adam, performing together for the first time, gave a rousing concert to an enthusiastic crowd, and gave a huge boost to women's music.

Besides promoting songs about political issues and lesbians' lives, the new women's music also set about to challenge stereotypes within the music industry. Women's bands featured women who excelled on non-traditional instruments such as the bass or trap set, and women began working in production and distribution as well as performing. In this spirit, Adam founded her own record label, Pleiades, to produce her work, and, in 1976, she released *Songwriter*, the first of many albums.

In 1977, Adam galvanized attendees at the National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, with her rousing anthem "We Shall Go Forth." In 1980 the recording of that performance became part of the Political History archives at the Smithsonian Institution. In April 2004, Adam sang the song at the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D. C.



A photograph of Margie Adam created by Angela Brinskele.
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Classically trained, Adam is influenced by a number of genres in developing her rich mellow style. Though her piano is a fitting accompaniment to her gentle message of love and social change, it is also strong enough to stand on its own in her instrumental pieces.

In 1980 Adam released her first instrumental album, *Naked Keys*, a compilation of meditative works that pioneered the calm, melodious music that would become known as "new age."

From 1984 through 1991, disheartened by the conservative climate of the Reagan era, Adam took a break from performing, calling it her "radical's sabbatical." She left the music industry to work in a chemical dependency program, though she continued to develop her art, studying voice and piano. In 1991, she returned to performing, releasing *Another Place* in 1993.

Adam has continued to write, perform, and record her music, increasingly combining politics and spirituality in her work. Determined to continue to work for change, even in the hostile environment of neo-conservatism, she established the Avalon Project. This project, started in conjunction with her 2001 album *Avalon*, hopes to revive radical feminist politics by encouraging political conversation and support for progressive organizations within the community.

Adam's interest in documenting lesbian history has spurred her serving as associate producer of the documentary films *Radical Harmonies: A History of Women's Music* (2002, directed by Dee Mosbacher) and *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon* (2003, directed by Joan E. Biren).

Adam's songs have been performed by artists such as Dusty Springfield, Holly Near, Cris Williamson, and Peter, Paul and Mary.

In 1997, Adam received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Michigan's Women's Music Festival, acknowledging her contribution to women's liberation and lesbian culture.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.