**Katie Oates**

Bio

Katie Oates has been singing for as long as she can remember. The daughter of a preacher, she belted hymns from her crib as a toddler to wake up her parents. Over the years she has sung a very wide variety of music genres (classical arias, folk, music theatre, blues, jazz, country, spirituals/sacred) in diverse settings: church choirs, a choir formed for unhoused people, oratorios, theatres of all sizes, bars, festivals, conferences, house concerts and listening rooms.

Fifteen years ago she decided to learn to play the guitar and began studying the craft of songwriting in intensive camps, workshops and mentorships with industry professionals. She released her first cd of original music: a 5-song EP, *Something True* in 2016, and a full cd, *Play Me* in 2017). In 2019 she was asked by her friend and mentor, legendary folk singer Si Kahn, to choose, arrange, and record 14 songs of his—culminating in her 4th album (2021’s *We Go On: Si Kahn’s Songs of Hope in Hard Times*). Staying true to her varied musical past, her albums always contain a mix of genres. “I have a comfortable two octave vocal range and experience singing in diverse settings,” Katie says “so I make use of that in the songs I write and choose to perform. I can produce a pure, clear sound or rough up my voice for a more pop sound—I can even scat a little.”

For her 5th album in 2024 (*Edge of a Hurricane*) Katie recorded another cd of original songs with an even wider variety of song styles—but there were lots of bumps along the way. Katie confesses “It’s been 7 years since I’ve released an album of original songs. I wrote a few songs after I released *Play Me,* but then I just stopped writing. I kept asking myself: ‘Why does it matter?’ It felt like such a precarious time to be creating. Hate and outrage swarm all around us: on social media, at community meetings, during family meal times—even driving down the interstate. As an artist, it’s hard to know how to respond. Some days I feel angry and despairing; other days I look around and remember all the wonder and good in the world.”

The breakthrough came in 2022 when Katie’s friend and mentor, Grammy nominated singer/songwriter Sally Barris, said to Katie: “You’re going to start writing songs again.” Katie reminisces: “Sally played Kate Wolf’s song ‘Across the Great Divide’ and said to me: ‘now write a song using a metaphor from nature that captures how you are feeling’. I hung up the phone and wrote the first verse of ‘Reason Enough’—the lead off song on my new album—as if I was taking dictation. Watching a bird outside my window sing its heart out became my ‘reason enough’ to sing my own songs again. It’s a fitting metaphor for me because whenever I get really low, nature reminds me how small my or the world’s troubles are compared to its vastness. Nature also reminds me that small things matter; they affect the universe too. And it encourages me to keep going.”

In 2024’s *Edge of a Hurricane* Katie confronts the storms in her heart and the forces buffeting us all: “I tried to plumb the depths of human emotion in my songwriting for this album. Some songs are quite different from what people expect to hear from me—or any folk singer. For example, ‘Tango’ is a rhythmic, exhilarating murder ballad in which the dancers kill each other in the end and ‘Disease’ is a full-on power rock ballad with confrontational lyrics in a growling, sarcastic tone. There are also lighthearted bluesy/swing songs (“Took You to Texas”, “The Wrong Place”, “Shoo Be”), a song about resilience during change (“Up in the Air”), and a folk protest song (‘Dark Clouds”).”

“The most hopeful ballads on the album (‘Heart of My Heart’, ‘Love Will Find a Way’, ‘Edge of a Hurricane’) and the jazzy (‘Shoo Be’) all emerge from my hard-fought battle with despair. Because in the end I think it’s as simple as a choice we each have to make between darkness and light. Hate seems so powerful, but all hate can do is destroy; only love can create something new. So I choose love. I hope you will, too. And maybe our small little acts will make a difference.”