

## Singer to bring 'luminous voice' to The Kate

By Lisa Reisman

OLD SAYBROOK — In February 1999, a friend invited Lara Herscovitch to perform with him as the opening act at a party in New York City.

At the time, Herscovitch, who will bring her "luminous voice and buoyant stage presence," as the Boston Globe put it, to The Kate on Saturday, was otherwise occupied.

She was preparing to pursue a doctoral degree in social policy. An education specialist for Save the Children, she'd spent six years doing humanitarian work in Latin America, Asia, Africa and throughout the United States.

Her foremost traveling companion on those travels: her guitar, which she took from its case for singing and writing songs in her hotel rooms.

"I started writing at around 9," she said during a telephone interview from her home studio in North Guilford, and routinely performed for friends at parties.

This was different. "It was an incredible night, a great crowd," Herscovitch told the New York Times in 2001. "Every single light bulb in my heart and soul went off. It wasn't even a choice. I knew I had to do this."

Over the next two decades, she did. But she also kept her series of day jobs, first at Greater



Joy Bush Photography / Contributed photo

North Guilford folk singer Lara Herscovitch as seen on the cover of her latest album, "Highway Philosophers."

Bridgeport Area Foundation, then overseeing initiatives to ensure healthy water at Save the Sound, and finally helping keep at-risk youth out of courts and prisons at the CT Juvenile Justice Alliance.

During her lunch hours, she was calling club owners to arrange bookings. On evenings and weekends, she was taking the stage at an open mic night, for a scheduled performance or she was recording songs in a studio. She

released six albums over that time.

"My day job feeds my music," she said at the time. "I like to believe that any artist is a better artist if they are balanced as an individual."

She kept going with her dual lives. In 2009, she was named Connecticut's state troubadour, an honorary position that entailed, promoting cultural literacy among Connecticut citizens as an ambassador of music and song.

That same year, she appeared on "A Prairie Home Companion" alongside Arlo Guthrie.

All the while, she was gaining renown as a singer-songwriter, prevailing in contests like Solarfest, the Family Folk Chorale and the Wooden Apple Music Festival, and appearing in emerging artist showcases at the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival and the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, among others.

The online magazine Acoustic Live in New York City took notice, reporting that "[Herscovitch] possesses not only a huge reservoir of musical talent and a voice with a bell-like clarity, but a keen sense of global social concern and a fierce intellect."

Sound Waves magazine praised her "expertly writ-

ten prose," "her crisp and pleasant vocals" and her "poetic, uplifting" lyrics as "songwriting at its best."

Herscovitch started writing her most recent album, "Highway Philosophers," in 2017, when she finally dedicated herself to making music full time. She released it in April 2020.

"It is my leap of faith, and many of the songs reflect that leap," she said.

"Sailing to Newfoundland" is a travel song about longing, about needing a change in scenery and in lifestyle. The moody "Fault Lines" delivers a sonic landscape on weathering anxiety.

"The Tiger & I" has her and the tiger firing a hot air balloon to escape the circus and "be free to be our best/let the highway do the rest."

Perhaps the catchiest number is the anthemic "Shine Sister Shine," which has Herscovitch singing of someone wanting to change her life but feeling frustrated and stuck, only to break into a boppy refrain about the joy of discovering "what she does, who she's born to be."

"It's about self-worth, at a time in the world when we have to be there for each other," she said of the song, which she's made into a YouTube video and an animated storybook. "I was thinking a lot about the world when I was putting this album together, what it needs from us, what we need from each other."

The pandemic, she said, "brought home how much music matters, as a point of comfort and connection and community building, both as a performer and as a fan of other musicians."

That's particularly true of live performance, it seems. "There's a sacred focus on what's happening in the live experience," said Herscovitch, who will be joined by multi-instrumentalist Jim Henry and upright bass player Henry Lugo.

"It connects not just the audience to the performer and the performer to the audience, but the audience to one other."

The fact that she's a musician, she said, "is just a detail. I'm always going to show up as my best self and help lift other people up into their best selves."

Lara Herscovitch will perform Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center, 300 Main St., Old Saybrook. For tickets and information, visit [katharinehepburntheater.org](http://katharinehepburntheater.org) or call 800-503-1286.