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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S "INSTITUTE ON THE ARTS AND CIVIC DIALOGUE" DEVELOPS "ZERO CHURCH" - A HEALING MESSAGE THROUGH ORIGINAL PRAYERS**

## **Compact Disc on Red House Records To Be Released Nationally On January 22**

NEW YORK, NY - "Zero Church," a new CD by Suzzy and Maggie Roche of the critically acclaimed folk-rock trio The Roches, is a completely unique collection of people's original prayers which the two sisters have set to music. But, make no mistake, THIS IS NOT A MUSIC STORY - rather it is a story about how individuals connect to God and how they express that connection.

"Zero Church" resulted from Suzzy's participation in Harvard University's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, founded by author/actress Anna Deavere Smith. The Institute brings together artists and audience in order to explore issues of race, identity, and community. Suzzy and Maggie searched for prayers throughout the Boston area. So inspiring was the experience and so haunting the music that was born of it, that the two knew it had to be made available to all.

"The 'Zero Church' prayers come from individuals of all different backgrounds and experience," says Suzzy. "Each prayer is a single life with an important and unique story - and yet they weave together to make one universal expression. I was scared by the responsibility we had - to work with prayers! But in the end, there was something greater than us at work. It was as if the music was already there and we had only to listen deeply to hear it."

Highlights of "Zero Church" include a prayer attributed to Mother Teresa titled "Anyway;" the moving words of a Vietnam veteran asking God's forgiveness for having murdered during wartime; and the thankful prayer of a freed Sudanese slave. The song "New York City" was Suzzy's heartfelt response to a request to participate in a memorial service for the victims and families of Squad One, a Brooklyn firehouse that lost half of its men in the September 11th tragedy - a tragedy which Suzzy, while walking her dog on that morning, was horrified to have witnessed.

In all aspects of its creation, "Zero Church" is about the humbling, heart-stirring reality of people's faith and endurance. "When we started our search for prayers, I wasn't sure what we were doing," wrote Suzzy Roche in the CD's liner notes. "Now I'm beginning to understand... something real about compassion, kindness and tolerance."

For additional information on the story of "Zero Church" and all who participated in it, contact Beth Friend, Red House Records at 651-646-9382 (bethfriend@aol.com ) Bob Feldman, Red House Records at 1-800-695-4687 (bobfeldman@red.houserecords.com)



# Suzzy & Maggie Roche

## ZERO CHURCH

RHR CD 157 • Release Date: January 22, 2002

**“Maggie had it written on her calendar ... the original release date for this collection of prayers ... September 11.**

**It had been pushed back several times before any of us knew what would actually happen on that day. That morning while walking my dog I had no idea when I turned the corner onto 9th Avenue I would watch in horror as planes purposely crashed into the World Trade Center. The sadness that engulfed New York City is too hard to describe. I found myself writing my own prayer and humbly adding it to this collection. When we began our search for prayers, I wasn't sure what we were doing. Now I understand. Something real about compassion, kindness and tolerance. This is one of those rare projects that comes along and defies categorization.” - From the liner notes by Suzzy Roche**



*Zero Church* is musically beautiful, unpretentiously spiritual and completely original. Although recorded prior to September 11, 2001, like much of this world it was changed by those agonizing events. Final production for the CD was halted in order that a beautiful new song that Suzzy & Maggie had written and performed for the families of the firemen could be added to its program. Its healing message has only taken on more meaning and more profundity.

Since 1979, The Roches (sisters Suzzy, Maggie & Terre) have blended every possible genre from a capella Handel and barbershop harmonies to country, folk and rock into a music marked by its refreshing honesty, wit, eccentricity and humor.

This extraordinary recording (the debut of Maggie and Suzzy performing as a duo) was inspired while attending playwright Anna Deavere Smith's "Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue" at Harvard University (a seminar where artists go to develop civic minded projects within community). Suzzy's & Maggie's project was to ask people to share a prayer with them so that they could set it to music. Some of the prayers they received were original and some were traditional. Many were not true prayers at all, but rather meditations or writings that had given comfort. As the songs took form, it was soon apparent that something very special was coming into being. With this beautiful CD we can hear for ourselves.

Exquisitely produced by Stewart Lerman, it features guest appearances by others who attended the institute, including Esaye Barnwell of Sweet Honey in the Rock as well as siblings David and Terre Roche. As the title might suggest, Zero Church espouses no particular doctrine or dogma, and draws its message from various faiths and walks of life. The actual origin of the title, however, comes from the intriguing address where the institute took place... 0 Church Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## Blues & Folk

# SISTERS' PSALMS: Suzzy and Maggie Roche Turn Prayer into Music on Zero Church



### Zero Church

Zero Church, a collection of prayers selected and set to music by Suzzy and Maggie Roche, was actually conceived some time before the September 11th tragedy, but it arrives, like a blessing, right on time. Suzzy Roche had attended the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at Harvard run by the acclaimed actress Anna Deavere Smith; there, Roche gathered many of the prayers that would later be used on the album. Zero Church, named for the address - Zero Church Street - where the institute would often meet, was already finished, but the subsequent World Trade Center attack added new emotional resonance to the existing project. (Suzzy added a song of her own, New York City, that dealt directly with the aftermath of the tragedy.) Nicky Roe of Barnes&Noble.com

spoke with Suzzy about the album and the power of musical prayer.

B&N.com: Whose idea was the project ultimately? Was it Anna Deavere Smith's, or did you guys sit around in a group and come up with it?

SR: No. I've had this idea for years and years, literally years and years. I just really had no idea where to go to do it because I didn't want to just have it be in the commercial context of, you know, making a CD and releasing it. Then, one day I got a letter and I don't really know why, but it was an invitation to apply to Anna's Institute. I didn't know who she was or the institute or anything, but what the letter said, well I just started shaking because I knew it was the right place to go, except that I was very frightened to go to Harvard. I was very intimidated. And then I went to see Anna perform here in New York and I left there thinking: Oh dear, I'm really in way over my head. I mean, she's brilliant and what she has done with this institute is really valuable. It's not often that people of those varied backgrounds and races get together in the same room and talk honestly. You know, it was very strange, but it was so good, so good, so good.

B&N.com: Were you raised in a religious family? Did you always pray?

SR: I was raised in a Catholic tradition and, yeah, I suppose I've always sang in choirs, and so maybe in a way that was the way that I prayed. But people don't even wanna hear the word "god" and that's distressing. That's one of things I hope: that maybe some people will hear something on the CD that might open them up to it.

B&N.com: I heard an interview on the radio, and I was quite relieved to hear you talk about your own cynicism, because after I finished listening to this album, I thought, Oh no, she's so saintly.

SR: Really I'm so not. That's really the thing. It was very, very hard not to get cynical. I mean I'm kind of a wise guy.

B&N.com: Yeah, that's how I always thought of you. Then I thought that maybe you went through a transformation when your dad died.

SR: Well, I think I did, actually, but at the same time I am not saintly. [laughs] And yet I am very moved by that open, tender place but find it very hard to live in that place. I mean, I have to admit I did struggle with that on this record because it's so pure, you know. It was an interesting challenge.

B&N.com: The prayers come from people who have suffered and who are suffering and yet still manage to reach through and they have their faith. I mean, that must make you feel much more open.

SR: They were given to me with such trust that I was amazed. I didn't know what I was going to get. I had no idea what kind of prayers, or what a prayer was to people, or any of that. And I didn't really have an agenda about that I was just kind of curious, you know. But wow! After talking to people it became clear that this was very serious business.

B&N.com: "New York City" was written for a benefit after September 11th for a Brooklyn firefighting squad that lost 12 men. Many kids were left behind. I guess for a mother that's pretty poignant fact.

SR: Well that, sure. But what happened, I mean for everybody, the loss of life was huge, and I think we're all still reeling from it. But to have to sing for someone right after that happened, it was a very difficult thing for me to figure out, and you know, that's when I prayed. I got down and started praying for the song. Later we were at another funeral for a firefighter, where someone who had heard that song at the benefit asked us to us sing at the funeral, for their brother who was lost in the WTC. There in the front row of the church was his wife and three young children, and you just realize how many of these funerals are happening all over the place.

B&N.com: Were you in town when it happened?

SR: Yeah. I was walking my dog and saw the second plane go in. It was unbelievable. I just happened to turn the corner and there's this big explosion, and a fireball came out of the side of the building. All of us on the street were just looking and no one really knew what was happening.

B&N.com. Will the Zero Church Project continue?

SR: Yes. It's going to be sort of one step further from what we did up at Harvard, but it will be all the prayers. It's going to involve dancers and actors as well.

B&N.com: You also work with the Wooster Group and the Four Bitchin' Babes.

SR: That's right. I'm all over the block. You can't get further apart than the Wooster Group and Four Bitchin' Babes, you know, they're totally at opposite ends. I do like to travel in lots of different circles.

B&N.com: Well, I'm sure it's very energizing and gets your creative juices flowing.

SR: It's not boring!

-January 2002

This story ran on page 1 of the Boston Globe's City Weekly section on January 27, 2002.

## **'Prayer' creates new life for vet**

By Steven Rosenberg, Globe Staff, Globe Correspondent,  
1/27/2002

### SOMERVILLE

They are simple, direct words that unleash a firestorm of emotion. "A Prayer" is Bill Barbeau's attempt at atonement for contributing to the deaths of Vietnamese in Southeast Asia. Below the surface of each line are dozens of stories that follow Barbeau from his childhood on the streets of Lawrence, to the jungles of Vietnam, and into the burning houses he has entered. The Somerville firefighter insists that he is not a writer and doesn't even remember exactly where he scribbled the prayer.

And these days, Barbeau's ode is getting nationwide exposure, now that singer Suzzy Roche has adapted it to music on her just-released CD, "Zero Church." Roche met Barbeau in the summer of 2000, when she was compiling lyrics and music about prayer at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at Harvard University. During a group discussion, Barbeau stood up and announced the telephone numbers of the Cambridge police and fire department, "to make people feel safe," Roche recalled. During an elevator ride, she asked Barbeau to be the first person to contribute to her project.

Barbeau, 54, was intrigued but did not make any promises. He had written his last poem as a student at Lawrence High School in the '60s. Still, Barbeau, who suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome, knew that there was something he wanted to address to God. A few weeks later, he invited Roche to his house and handed her "A Prayer."

Roche was astonished by the spiritual anguish of Barbeau's prayer. Her first thought was to abandon the project and go back to her home in New York. "I was so moved by the prayer that I didn't think that I could do it justice," she remembered. "Luckily, my sister Maggie had just arrived and I gave it to her and she worked on the music".

The Roche sisters, known for their trademark harmonies, create a shrill evocation of death in "A Prayer." According to Suzzy Roche, it's one of their most requested songs in recent concerts, and it's usually met with silence by the audience.

"It's hard for me to listen to the song," Barbeau said, sitting at home with his wife, Elizabeth, and 10-month-old son, Luc. "I'm still angry at God."

Barbeau left Lawrence and arrived in Vietnam when he was 19 in 1967. A lance corporal, he was trained as a Marine scout dog handler, and was a member of the 1st and 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion. His best friend was his dog Satan, an 85-pound German shepherd, who led him in and out of the jungles, often saving his life during his 13 months of service. "They'd take you out in a helicopter and drop you in the middle of nowhere, and then you'd go and kill people," he recalled. "You didn't just go and randomly shoot anybody." The missions were aimed at killing village strongmen, spies and military leaders.

"We were killers; we were terrors. We used to come out of the jungle, raise holy hell in a village, kill whoever we had to kill and disappear back into the jungle."

Barbeau and Satan made 27 trips into the bushes of North Vietnam and Laos, operating as part of small elite teams, with Barbeau and Satan leading the units. "My job was to interpret what Satan was smelling, seeing and

hearing, and how far away the snipers were,” said Barbeau. A typical mission would last from 10 to 15 days, with Barbeau carrying 17 canteens of water for Satan. After five days, the soldiers would run out of food, and often resorted to eating the rations of dead Vietnamese.

Barbeau watched dozens of friends die, often just a few feet away. He even was listed as missing and presumed dead after 210 US soldiers died in a firefight in 1968. That night he guarded the bodies of the men he had fought with earlier in the day, as they lay stacked in a semi-circle. “I spent the whole night watching this kid’s face, obviously dead,” said Barbeau, “and found myself wishing that he was alive. Maybe there was a little spark left in him? Maybe they missed someone?”

Barbeau often thinks of Satan, who died in an artillery barrage five months after Barbeau was discharged.

He returned to Lawrence after the war, conscious of the dead he had left behind. “When I got home and I realized that they couldn’t touch me any more, I had a little ceremony in my father’s driveway, and I burned my uniform,” he recalled.

In 1974, he became a firefighter in Somerville, and now works at the Lowell Street fire station. “He works until we have to pull him out sometimes,” said Sylvester Moore, a firefighter who has worked with him for 13 years.

Barbeau eventually returned to reserve duty with the Army, and was stationed for 22 months in the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War.

Now, after 28 years of fighting fires, he’s planning on starting a career in another helping profession: as a nurse.

He still suffers daily flashbacks and hallucinations from Vietnam, but works through the memories with a counselor from the Veteran’s Administration. He doesn’t find it easy to talk about anything except for his son and his wife, but he’s hoping veterans who hear the song, and who’ve had similar experiences, receive professional help.

“I revisit some part of it every day,” he observed. “It just never goes away.”

Steven Rosenberg is a Globe correspondent.

## **Roche sisters find inspiration in diversity of prayer Duo's reverent 'Zero Church' disc sets heavenly petitions to music**

By DAVID YONKE  
BLADE RELIGION EDITOR

Suzzy Roche said she was compelled to record "Zero Church," a diverse collection of prayers set to music, but didn't know how or why.

After years of tossing the idea around, the breakthrough came when she and her sister, Maggie, attended a diversity seminar at Harvard University. The finished product, originally set for release Sept 11, comes out Tuesday on the Red House label (available at [www.redhouserecords.com](http://www.redhouserecords.com)).

"When I started, I wasn't sure why I kept thinking of doing it," said Suzzy (whose name rhymes with "Fuzzy"). "I don't know why it was just bothering me to find a way to do this."

Prayers have been set to music throughout history, but they usually are written within a specific religious context; she said in a recent interview from her Manhattan home. Her goal for "Zero Church" was to create music for prayers from people of various faiths and backgrounds.

Suzzy, 45, and Maggie, 50, found inspiration at a three-month seminar at Harvard University's Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, founded by playwright Ann Deavere Smith.

"Ann's main area of work is diversity, trying to get different groups of people to talk to each other," Ms. Roche said. "The institute was the perfect place for me to do this because I was looking for a cross section of people. I had been looking at this project for years but didn't really know where to go."

The Roche sisters asked seminar participants, members of the Boston-area community, and friends to write down and give them copies of their prayers. They were able to compile petitions from a broad spectrum of faiths. Some prayers were traditional; others were personal and written specifically for "Zero Church."

The words to "The Prayer," for example, were written by Bill Barbeau, a Vietnam veteran who asks God to forgive him because "I killed a lot of people for no good reason" during the war.

Another song, "Hallelujah," was penned by Frankie Harris, a woman with AIDS, who asks God to strengthen the doctors and nurses and says, "Lord give 'em a kind word to say cause you are the beginning of this and you are gonna be the end."

The opening and closing tracks, "Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray" and "Musical Prayer by Francis Bok" are slave songs. "Praise for a New Day" is from a Buddhist yogi and "Each of Us Has a Name" is a traditional Jewish prayer.

Suzzy Roche said she talked at length to the individuals who submitted their prayers and tried to find the perfect musical match for each one.

"I read somewhere that Bill Clinton asked Mother Teresa what she said when she prayed and she said, "I don't say anything, I just listen." That little quote I took really seriously and felt that that was my main job in this

project, to listen to other people and to stay out of the way.”

Unlike her previous songwriting efforts, Suzzy said, she tried not to make everything conform to her own artistic views, but strove to create music that would be appropriate for the prayer.

“I felt very, very responsible. It was very important to each person and I really wanted to capture the feeling,” she said.

“They gave me an apartment to live in which was on top of Cambridge, way up high. It was like being in heaven, really. And I had all the prayers taped up to the window and it was like they were written on the sky, quite a beautiful thing.”

When the Inspiration arrived, it was “like a flurry of music,” she said.

“I really did work all day long. I would just get up and go in my pajamas to the keyboard or guitar and just start. It was like listening for the music, almost like it was already there...”

This review appeared in the San Diego Union News

**Suzzy & Maggie Roche**  
**“Zero Church”**

Forget Enya’s “A Day Without Rain.” For music that really soothes in the wake of Sept. 11 — and is intelligent to boot — Suzzy and Maggie Roche’s “Zero Church” is worlds better. Eighteen musical interpretations of actual prayers that cross religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries, this album is a moving testament to strength and faith.

Bolstering the sublime harmonies and a capella work of the Roches (who have never sounded better) are gospel voices including Ysaye Barnwell of Sweet Honey in the Rock and Broadway vet Lynette DuPree. The musical prayers they create are, well, heavenly.

- DAVID L. CODDON

This review appeared in the Cleveland Free Times, 2002

## **Suzzy & Maggie Roche**

### **Zero Church**

(Red House)

If September 11 marked the death of cynicism, January 22, the release date of Zero Church, will mark the day that Suzzy and Maggie Roche danced on its grave. The release is an unapologetically spiritual collection of prayers written by participants in a Harvard seminar on the arts and civic dialogue. Some have a liturgical flow, some are whimsical, and some, such as Vietnam veteran Bill Barbeau's "A Prayer," are so intensely personal that you feel guilty eavesdropping. None of the lyrics are great poetry by the conventional definition, but all are deeply moving. If unabashed religiosity makes you squirm, you might find this CD discomfoting, regardless of its all-embracing ecumenism. But the Roche sisters, harmonies are as celestial as ever. One of the most touching tracks, "New York City," is a ringer for early Simon and Garfunkel in its melodic and harmonic structure. There's nary a postmodern sneer to be found in 18 lovely tracks.

**A MINUS** -- Peggy Latkovich

The following review appeared in USA Today, January 30, 2002

## **Roches head to ‘Church’**

**By Brian Mansfield, Special for USA TODAY**

Suzzy and Maggie Roche had little idea what to expect when they began asking people to give them prayers they could set to music.

“It’s a very delicate subject, talking to people about their prayers,” says Suzzy, who, along with her older sister, also is part of the New York based folk trio The Roches. Suzzy and Maggie’s new album, *Zero Church*, released last week, is an openhearted collection of prayers from people representing a wide range of religious, ethnic and social backgrounds.

The songs on *Zero Church* have tender yet unruly melodies that rarely go where expected, or move when it seems they should—a lot like good prayers, ones spoken from the heart and not from years of absorbing the phrases and cadences of church services. One prayer comes from an AIDS patient who praises a merciful God, then asks for blessings for patients. In another, a former slave from Sudan expresses his gratitude for deliverance from his plight. A Massachusetts firefighter and Vietnam veteran struggles to come to terms with his actions during the war.

“A lot of the people on the record have had a lot of trouble in their lives,” Suzzy says. “I discovered that when there is a lot of trouble, there is a certain humility and openness and vulnerability that enables people to pray.”

One of Suzzy’s most moving pieces came after the attacks on Sept. 11—the date originally planned for *Zero Church*’s release. Written for a New York firehouse that lost a dozen men when the twin towers collapsed, New York City begins, “Here’s a song for the heroes who were braver than I could ever be.” Suzzy and Maggie have since performed it at a memorial service for a firefighter who died at Ground Zero.

*Zero Church* began as a project at the Institute on the Arts & Civic Dialogue, a Cambridge, Mass., program founded by playwright/actress/educator Anna Deavere Smith. Though the album takes its name from the location where the institute meets Zero Church Street in Cambridge, the title also has spiritual implications.

“Religions can be exclusive, but basically this doesn’t exclude anybody” notes Suzzy Roche, who adds that she was raised in the Catholic Church, “but I’ve had my troubles remaining a Catholic.” Now, she says, “I go to many different churches and many different synagogues—any place that people are into worshiping. I like to go to those places, because I find them very peaceful.”

The collection uses a spiritual, a Shaker hymn, a poem associated with Mother Teresa and a Hebrew chant for source material, and includes contributions from Jews, Christians, a Buddhist—even an agnostic, who prays “to know what to say when I see whatever’s above.”

“No matter what people believe, it’s for everyone,” Roche says. “God belongs to everyone.”

The Following review appeared in the Christian Science Monitor, February 8, 2002

## **Roche sisters set prayers to music in 'Zero Church'**

By Lynne Margolis | Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Suzzy Roche grew up singing in church, where she perfected choral harmonies with her sister Maggie before they and a third sister, Terre, created the angelic-sounding group The Roches.

So Suzzy understood the power of prayer. And she had wanted to record a collection of prayers - specifically, prayers expressing personal feelings, whether they came from organized religion or not. Speaking from her home in New York City, Suzzy explains, "Finding out what prayers meant to individual people, that was really the thing I was interested in."

The result is "Zero Church," a beautiful and remarkably moving album created during a six-week seminar at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.

Among its 18 entries are a song of thanks for freedom from a former Sudanese slave, a Vietnam veteran's plea for atonement for his wartime actions, and a mother's reaction to hearing another mother's pain upon learning that her son (Matthew Shepard) had been beaten to death because he was gay.

Also included are a Shaker hymn, a Hebrew chant, a verse from the Book of Jeremiah, and author Ruben Martinez's "migrant prayer" - prayers of joy, sorrow, and hope for redemption, all submitted by people who had written or found these verses and made spiritual connections.

Suzzy hadn't heard about the arts institute, founded by actor-playwright Anna Deavere Smith, until she was invited to apply in early 2000. When she learned what it was, she knew it was the place where her concept could come to life. Ms. Smith "has created this community of people from all different walks of life, and that is so rare," Suzzy says, noting that in New York City, "there's more of a co-existing and not necessarily an active dialogue."

Many of the prayers came from a "core audience" of community members who agreed to participate in the dialogues and projects. Sometimes, they spread the word. Suzzy learned about ex-slave Francis Bok from a nun in the group. His is the only spoken-word prayer on the album.

"A woman just called me on the phone and said, 'Meet me in five minutes.' And there was Francis, and he told us his incredible story."

Much of the rehearsing for the album occurred at 0 Church Street in Cambridge, Mass., which happens to be a church. But the album's contents give the title a larger context and listeners an understanding that faith is not confined to houses of worship - though Suzzy agrees that for some people, organized religion "is where they sustain their faith. I didn't really have an agenda of what I was trying to say, 'cause it's not me," she says. "It's obviously a much bigger subject than me."

Suzzy and Maggie wrote much of the music and do a good deal of the gospel or delicate choral singing, aided by Esaye Barnwell of the singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock; Lynette DuPree, an institute artist; and siblings Terre and David Roche.

Suzzy included only one prayer of her own, "New York City," which she wrote for a firefighters' benefit well after the album's original release date: Sept. 11, 2001. A later date already had been picked as she walked her dog that morning and witnessed the day's devastating events.

Suzzy doesn't belong to a specific church, but she notes, "I'm always attracted and drawn to people who have faith. Faith is really the thing. Because I'm always losing faith."

She doesn't know if she'll make another album like this one, but it's possible. "You could go on forever doing this," she says. "The world is just filled with prayers."

The following review appeared in The Chicago Tribune, December 18, 2002

## MUSIC REVIEW

# Unique spin on spirituality distinguishes Roche sisters

## Imaginative vocals steer songs miles from traditional fare

By Kevin McKeough  
Special to the Tribune

It wasn't your typical prayer meeting, what with the shotgun shack set and the hymns interspersed between an unapologetic account of affairs with married men and a rendition of "Winter Wonderland" delivered in exaggerated Brooklyn accents.

Then again, Suzzy and Maggie Roche have never been typical, even by the standards of contemporary singer-songwriters. Throughout their 20 years as a trio with their sister Terre, the Roches were distinctive for their unpredictable mix of folk, Irish, pop and a capella music and the witty, quizzical perspective their songs expressed.

The Roches individually have continued working off the beaten path since they began pursuing solo projects a few years ago, and it's resulted in an extraordinary effort. On "Zero Church," a CD released earlier this year, Suzzy and Maggie made songs out of prayers they gathered from Boston-area residents while they were taking part in an arts collaborative at Harvard University.

Songs from "Zero Church" were the centerpiece of Suzzy and Maggie Roche's performance Monday night as part of Steppenwolf Theatre's Traffic series. The project's title reflects both its origins—Zero Church Street on the Harvard campus—and the non-denominational, open-ended spirituality the prayer songs expressed.

Although they drew on gospel music for the stunning call-and-response harmonies Suzzy and Maggie frequently sang with their brother David and percussionist Marlon Cherry, the words of the prayers ranged far from traditional songs of praise.

A Vietnam War veteran's prayer for forgiveness for the killing he did in combat described one man's personal hell even as Maggie's solemn piano and the sisters' Latin mass harmonies rang with redemption. There was mirth, too, as "Anyway" wryly championed the importance of doing good deeds despite negative reactions.

The songs' lilting, leaping melodies were set to arrangements that drew on folk and country as well as sacred music. David Roche played twanging guitar leads, Patrick Tully added muted piano, and Cherry provided fine, subtle percussion, plus thrilling falsetto testifying during a turn at lead vocals on "Teach Me O Lord."

Although the material flirted with self-indulgence, the only outright lapse was a well-intentioned but too-explicit interpretation of "Sounds"—inspired by the murder of Matthew Shepard—by mime Bill Bowers that distracted from the poignancy of the song itself.

Otherwise, Suzzy kept things light with her white spats and kooky banter, and Maggie suggested a Motown earth mother with her salt and pepper hair, glasses, and bass guitar. Depending on the song, the combination of Suzzy's highflying soprano and Maggie's soulful alto produced both the haunting effects of religious chant and the whimsical delights of the Roches' early material.

At the end of the evening, Suzzy and Maggie sang "let us all pray that we may finally live in harmony," and their own voices provided a glorious example of the ideal expressed in that sentiment and in this performance.

The following article appeared in The Copley News Service Illinois Wire, December 12, 2002

## **The Roches concert in the Traffic series at the Steppenwolf Theatre**

By Dan Zeff  
Copley News Service

CHICAGO. There was a love-in at the Monday night Traffic series concert at the Steppenwolf Theatre. A capacity audience sat in rapt attention as the Roches entertained with their unique blend of music that borrows from just about every strain of American popular music.

The Roches are the sisters Suzzy and Maggie. Along with their sister Terre, they have carved out a cult following that originated in the folk club scene of the 1970's and 1980's. Terre Roche is doing solo work now, leaving her sisters to perform as a duo.

The Roches blend their music from a combination of folk, gospel, religious, soft rock, country, and pop. Yet it comes out as a, style special to them. If there is any point of comparison, it may be the singing of Simon and Garfunkel. Indeed, the Roches first recording was as backup singers to Paul Simon's 1972 album, "There Goes Rhymin' Simon."

The Roches perform original material, mostly written by Suzzy (pronounced SUH zee) with music by Maggie. The program Monday night was a broad sampling of their offbeat repertoire, especially selections from their latest CD. "Zero Church." The album is a collection of nondenominational prayers the sisters collected while attending an arts conference at Harvard University.

The prayers, some religious and some secular, were contributed by a variety of common people, from a Massachusetts fireman still atoning for his killing sprees as a soldier in Vietnam to a former resident of the Sudan thankful for liberation from years of slavery as a child in his native country.

The sisters accompanied themselves on guitars, along with discreet, musical and vocal assistance from a trio made up of brother David Roche (guitar), Marlon Cherry (percussion), and Patrick Tully (piano).

Suzzy was the chatty master of ceremonies, while Maggie stood quietly like an ethereal presence. Suzzy cemented the bond between the performers and the audience with her informal and artless comments on the sisters' music and life experiences. She seemed genuinely pleased and flattered by the enthusiasm of the crowd.

The 100-minute intermissionless concert shifted emotional gears from the comic to the serious to, the devout to the poignant to the angry. Informality was the watchword but the presentation was a superior exercise in professionalism without turning slick.

As a first-time listener to the Roches, I was most impressed, and entertained, by the freshness, of the material. The sisters sang only one familiar number, a rendition of "Winter Wonderland" delivered with a comical New Jersey twang. Many of the pieces were story songs, like a plea by a young woman to get her job back as a waitress.

A couple of the prayers were preceded monologues that were recorded by the authors. There was also a song commemorating the death of Matthew Shephard. The young gay man murdered in Laramie, Wyo., a few years ago. The song was accompanied by a mime dance by the song's author, which injected the only arty note into the evening.

It's rare to see performers connect with such immediacy with their listeners, without affectation or phony modesty. Most of the audience was obviously pre-sold on the Roches, and the women did not disappoint. The Steppenwolf Theatre was a perfect fit for a casual concert of this nature, allowing the affection and appreciation to flow freely between the fans and the performers. Truly, a good time was had by all.

# SUZZY ROCHE

SONGS FROM AN UNMARRIED HOUSEWIFE  
AND MOTHER, GREENWICH VILLAGE, USA

RHR CD 156 • AVAILABLE ON CD ONLY

With *Songs From an Unmarried Housewife and Mother, Greenwich Village, USA*, Suzzy Roche returns with more of the graciously poetic lyrics and subtle melodic turns that made her first solo album, *Holy Smokes*, such a delight. Produced by **Stewart Lerman**, and boasting guest appearances by **Loudon Wainwright**, **Jules Shear** and sister **Maggie Roche**, *Songs...* serves up a heavenly slice of vocal interplay—thick with the quirky imagery and mental slants that so endeared the **Roches'** music to fans worldwide.

Starting with a snappy *Yankee Doodle*, Suzzy then rolls quietly into *Looking for God* with her gentle musical musings captured in a soap bubble of a song. Sister Maggie's humorous *G Chord Song* sparkles with the voices of mother and daughter, Suzzy and Lucy Roche, as they poke fun at the ubiquity of certain song topics. Suzzy teams up with Loudon Wainwright and Jules Shear for an unforgettable take on Shear's *Cold Hard Wind*. *Goodbye Cruel World* and *Born Yesterday* pair Suzzy with sister Maggie, and those amazing Roche harmonies creep into the mix as they deliver direct lyrical hits like "I was born yesterday—don't know nothin'—eyes open wide—seem to be on a funny farm." *Sweetie Pie* closes the album with a pared down trio of piano, violin and Suzzy's voice—"You always say I love you when you say goodbye, sweetie pie."

*Songs...* is an enchanting collection. And when one looks at Suzzy's history, it's easy to see where it comes from. A veteran of the music business—Suzzy, along with sisters Maggie and Terre, has been singing her entire life. The Roches put out a total of ten albums, and have made numerous appearances on shows such

as *Saturday Night Live*, *The Tonight Show* and *A Prairie Home Companion*. Suzzy has toured extensively, and graced stages across the country. Suzzy is also an accomplished actress, appearing in *Crossing Delancy* (with **Amy Irving**) and working in live theater with **The Wooster Group** and other ensembles. With such a background, it's no wonder that Suzzy's music is able to make you think as well as gasp with delight.



"Pure poetry....(Roche) has a knack for creating amazing turns of melody."  
—*Newsday*



"Suzzy makes music that's as hip and much smarter than any of today's female singing sensations."  
—*Times Herald-Record*

## Suzzy Roche • Quotes

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"Roche is a terrific, self-assured singer-songwriter. Her reedy alto stands up just fine without sisterly accompaniment, her lyrics are more personal than the Roches' and her melodic sense is as vivid."

—*New York*

"Roche has a way of taking sideways glances at life's peculiar side. In all, this is a near-perfect slice of light, tangy folk music."

—*Option*

"For all the female artists she has influenced, Suzzy Roche should be pulling down Madonna-like dollars...after all these years and albums, Roche is still as fresh and relevant as any of them—and more so than most."

—*Buzz Weekly*

"Pure poetry....(Roche) has a knack for creating amazing turns of melody. They can be so pretty it hurts, or so effective they just melt you away."

—*Newsday*

"Downplaying her trademark barbed humor in favor of gently forthright introspection, whispery tunes like 'Eggshell' and 'Two Bumps on a Log' find Roche confronting troublesome midlife issues with a graciously grown-up sense of acceptance."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Suzzy's creative acting ability pours into her music, which is candid and animated...the album sings like a spoken play. It's funny, it's sad and it's from the heart. Attend it."

—*Victory Review*

"Deeply personal and sometimes quirky songs carried by difficult-to-describe melodies...The 12 cuts are often beautifully simple while other times unpredictably free-flowing and complex."

—*9X*

"*Holy Smokes*—a catchy, clever, eclectic record—ends up perfectly defining 'the sound of one Roche singing.'"

—*Courier Post*

"This grown-up Suzzy Roche offers songs of experience and loss with ample capacity to console."

—*US 1*

"Alanis, Jewel and Paula have nothing musical on Suzzy Roche. On her first album since taking a break from her singing sisters, Suzzy makes music that's as hip and much smarter than any of today's female singing sensations."

—*Times Herald-Record*

"[*Holy Smokes* is] full of gentle rhythms, tasteful country fiddle and pedal steel, and warmed by understated harmonies. Many of the features that made The Roches so endearing—tunefulness, conversational style, clever constructions, telling details, compassion and quirky humour—can be found here too, but this is more intimate territory."

—*Q*

## Suzzy Roche • Biography

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With over twenty years of experience as a performer, Suzzy Roche is a seasoned veteran of the music business. Since the late Seventies, we've known her as the youngest of the Roches, the trio of sisters that have long been critical darlings, widely popular, and exceedingly influential. With the Roches, Suzzy was always the front woman, knocking out audiences with her entrancing stage presence, actor's delight in performance, hilarious epiphanies, and deadpan humor. Stepping out as a solo artist, she has combined her presence and wit with a sense of intimacy—creating an exceptionally captivating performance.

Along with her sisters, Maggie and Terre, Suzzy has been singing her entire life. Growing up in Park Ridge, New Jersey, they got their love of music, bent sense of humor, and odd take on the world from their parents, and their artistic expression was always strongly encouraged. Maggie and Terre began performing in high school, and while still teenagers, recorded their first album (with Paul Simon producing). About a year later, Suzzy (who by this time was a college student studying drama) joined them for some Christmas caroling, and they've been a trio since. One of the first all-female bands, and always extremely original, the Roches constantly broke new ground. Their first album, *The Roches*, was produced by King Crimson's Robert Fripp and released by Warner Brothers. The album was a hit—named one of the top ten albums of the year by the *New York Times*—and the Roches were suddenly all the rage.

The Roches have released ten albums over a span of fifteen years. They include the Christmas album, *We Three Kings*, which has become a seasonal classic, and a children's album, *Will You Be My Friend?*, winner of a *Parent's Choice* Gold Award. Over the course of their career they have recorded with Paul Simon, the Indigo Girls, Kathy Mattea, Loudon Wainwright, Philip Glass, Was Not Was, Laurie Anderson and others. They've graced the stages of such venues as Carnegie Hall, the Guthrie Theater and the Newport Folk Festival. They've also performed on *Saturday Night Live*, *The Tonight Show*, *David Letterman*, and *A Prairie Home Companion*. They have toured Europe extensively; have been featured in a episode of the *Tracey Ullman Show* on HBO; and even co-starred with Porky Pig in a *Tiny Toons* cartoon.

Throughout this time, Suzzy continued to pursue work as an actor. Her most notable role was in *Crossing Delancey* (with Amy Irving), a film which also featured the Roches' music. She has also worked on films with actors such as Jack Lemmon and John Heard, and in live theater with the Wooster Group and other ensembles. Suzzy's film work has included her music as well—she composed music for Steven Spielberg's *The Land Before Time*.

Suzzy's first solo effort, *Holy Smokes* (1997), delighted both fans and critics alike. Co-produced by Stewart Lerman (who produced three of the Roches albums: *Can We Go Home Now?*, *Will You Be My Friend?*, and *A Dove*), *Holy Smokes* featured twelve of Suzzy's original songs and boasted a stellar ensemble of musicians as well, including Suzzy on guitar and keyboards, Stuart Smith, David Mansfield, Larry Campbell, Paul Ossola, and Frank Vilardi, and guest vocalists Maggie Roche and Jules Shear.

*Songs From an Unmarried Housewife and Mother, Greenwich Village, USA* delivers more of the same. With notable contributions from Loudon Wainwright, Jules Shear, Maggie Roche, and her own daughter Lucy Roche (now college-age and contributing to the Roche musical mix herself!) the album virtually soars along, carried by her lyrical poetry and the amazing vocal interplay. These songs encompass the best qualities of her work with The Roches, but with a more stark and personal approach. They are strikingly honest, wry and intelligent—her writing goes straight to the bone—sharing those little moments that make you hold your breath.

## Folk

# SINGLE MOM SINGS

Roche Sister Suzzy Finds Harmony on Her Own



Suzzy Roche, together with her sisters Maggie and Terre, has spent more than 20 years in one of the great vocal groups in contemporary folk music. The Roches have recorded ten albums, lending their innovative harmonies to everything from Handel and Christmas carols to a spate of original songs that explore the joy and longings of everyday life. In 1997, Suzzy recorded her first solo album, *HOLY SMOKES*, a series of songs exploring her grief following the death of her father. Four years later, she returns with *SONGS FROM AN UNMARRIED HOUSEWIFE*, a disc full of the joy of finding healing love and harmony in unexpected places. Roche talked to Karl Hagstrom Miller from her apartment in Greenwich Village, USA.

bn.com: A lot of folks know you as part of the Roches. How was making a solo record different from making a Roches record?

Suzzy Roche: Well, it's completely different. When working with the Roches, it's like trying to focus three energies into one thing. Doing a solo record, it's just you, so you can do whatever you want. It's harder in some ways to do your own, I find. I like to collaborate with people, so it's been very difficult for me to stand up and hear my own voice - take it seriously.

bn: Were there any surprises in making the transition to solo work?

SR: I guess I didn't expect anybody to listen to it. Honestly. In a way, being in the Roches you were sort of anonymous, because people don't really know one from the other. There's kind of a protection there. But being solo, suddenly people are looking at you. It's been hard for me - or different. That's a surprise. And the fact that anyone buys the record and listens to it is always a surprise.

bn: One thing I have always loved about the Roches is the incredible, surprising harmonies. How did you learn to sing harmony?

SR: Church was my first exposure to harmony. Then, we used to sing when we were little. Maggie [Roche] had a particular gift for harmony. As we got older, it got more complicated, and we spent a lot of time on the harmonies - one note at a time, figuring out three parts. In a way, I think we worked out a lot of sibling angst by working out those harmonies. It was your note among the three that you had to sing, so figuring out which note you had to sing was how you were going to fit into the three sisters thing. Maybe that's why our harmonies were so interesting. [laughs] It's fun to sing harmony. The feeling of singing with two other voices is very pleasing.

bn: In "G Chord Song" from the new album, you say that if you are going to be a musician you better love making music. What do you like about singing the tune?

SR: Singing is a life lesson - how to sing, how to really be in the moment. I guess it's an art form. There is no

end to the exploration of it. It's a real key into life. In order to really sing you have to stay with every moment as you are singing, and that is so enjoyable. I hope everyone does sing, because it's such a great thing to explore, especially when you are not singing to perform but singing internally and letting it come out. It's a whole different thing. I think when I started singing when we were little kids - my father used to line us up and write a song that we all had to sing. It was like, "OK, now perform," so you just did it. It was terrifying. I hated it. So my life's journey has been how to get that singing connected to myself so that it's not for someone else. Yet it is eventually for someone else, but it's not something that you have to do.

bn: Did your father encourage your singing in your youth?

SR: He did. I make it sound like he pushed us, but I was just very shy. He just liked it. He loved to hear everything we did. He thought we were amazing. [laughs] Other people would sit there and groan, but he thought we were the bee's knees.

bn: Who are some of your favorite songwriters?

SR: Jules Shear is one of my favorites. Iris DeMent is another person that I really love. One of my all time favorites is a singer named Val Haynes, "Lonesome Val." She is amazing. She actually wrote "Love Comes to Town" with me. She is an amazing songwriter. She has had a big influence on me. Also, my sisters I have a partial thing for. Loudon Wainwright is another.

bn: What other music have you been listening to lately?

SR: Ella Fitzgerald. I've been into her lately. And I've been listening to the Chordettes. They are a really tight harmony group. And then I listen to whatever my daughter brings around. Anything that anyone plays for me. But I really like mellow stuff where you can really hear the singer singing.

bn: The album shifts between odes to the joy of love and living and songs that look at the detailed realities of being in a relationship. What personal space were you in when worked on it?

SR: The first record that I made was really coming out of the fact that my father died. I was extremely crushed by that, and my life fell apart internally. This record is really about what happens after that happens, you know, the places that love comes from. I was helpless. I needed help from the outside world that I had not experienced before, and I found it in the details. I started having to listen in a different way than I used to listen, and all the ordinary things of life were the things that helped me. I wanted to give out into the world something about that. Also, even the title of the record - one of the things about having my life and career - the whole time I was having this career I was raising a child alone. There is sort of stigma of that. I have traveled in that world simultaneously to having a career in show business. I wanted that to be in the album, too.

bn: This is your second solo disc for Red House Records. How do you like working with that label?

SR: They are so great. I was so lucky. I didn't want to go and try to make a big solo career for myself. That wasn't my intention. I didn't want to go out and make myself look like I was 20 years old and be "Suzzy Roche, the Solo Artist." I wanted to be able to use my own songs and not have to try to make something that would be played on the radio. Red House immediately liked the tape that I sent. All those people there are really genuine. You call up and can talk to them. [laughs] That was the period when I was just on the floor with grief, and they came out of nowhere and reached out to me. It's nice to have support instead of always fighting to get to do what you want to do, which we had to do our whole career.

bn: Did you have to do a lot of fighting for the Roches records?

SR: Everything was a fight from the way we looked and what we were wearing to the songs we were singing and the fact that we were three women and there were no men playing with us. Every step of the way was a fight. We really carved a pathway for other people. Now it's not like that. I think that's really great. I am very happy about that. But after awhile, we just closed ranks and stuck together and just did it. That's one of the reasons we had to stop. We were so insulated, because the magic of what we were doing depended on us doing it our way. Every time you opened up somebody would come in and try to change it in order to make money. But it never worked. The only thing that worked was us doing what we did. But you can't live like that. It's like being Siamese twins or something. We needed to open a bit.

bn: How was it singing with your daughter Lucy on "G Chord Song"?

SR: Oh, it's just so great. Our whole family is musicians. She is coming of age, and the whole idea of singing is something she has had to sort through. She had a tape of Maggie and Terre singing when they were teenagers her age. That song is a song that Maggie wrote and is on that tape, and Lucy liked it and asked me if we could learn it. In the same way that my father thought that we were amazing, I think that she's amazing. [laughs]

Karl Hagstrom Miller

## Symphony of a City

### Yankee doodle do or die: Suzzy Roche

#### Suzzy Roche hits the road with a new album about the beauty of staying home

By Keith Harris

Hard to figure why Suzzy Roche's voice still sounds so unfamiliar on its own. After all, her rangy chirp hasn't been cushioned between the apparently weightless soprano of sister Terre and the grounded alto of sister Maggie for five years now, at least on disc, ever since the Roches disbanded after two decades together. And Suzzy's new album, *Songs From an Unmarried Housewife and Mother, Greenwich Village, USA*, isn't even Suzzy's solo debut: It's her second work on the valiant St. Paul folk label Red House. Yet the sense of play she brought to the Roches, always bobbed in buoyant harmony between her older sisters, now sounds precarious without them.

That voice hardly seems frail or wobbly, but it does seem exposed and somewhat vulnerable. It retains an almost girlish brightness of tone—though Roche never tries to mask her 43 years with an affected naiveté. The resulting sparseness gives the music an intimacy that Roche makes the most of, kicking off her new album with an all-American, childlike reverie—one foisted upon most of us when we were kids—as if to deliberately begin at the beginning.

The words she sings are almost unbearably familiar: “Yankee Doodle went to town/Riding on a pony...” (like I have to quote more). Except for “This Land Is Your Land,” no other American folk anthem is as tainted by memories of compulsory grade school chorus. And except for “This Land Is Your Land,” no anthem is so ingrained in the mythology of American populist art. In the 19th Century, working-class crowds would interrupt performances of *Twelfth Night* or *The Barber of Seville* and demand a chorus or two of “Yankee Doodle.” If ignored, they'd rip out the seats indignantly.

If appeased, on the other hand, they'd rip out the seats in celebration.

Though hardly stodgy or aristocratic, Roche brings a breezy sensibility to the song, coming off as far removed from such prole anarchy. Referring to the sleeve photo of the Roches' self-titled classic debut, where the three sisters are mugging ridiculously stylized gazes at one another, a friend of mine remarked that the Roches must have grown up in “a whole Montessori neighborhood.” In actuality, the sisters grew up in “deepest New Jersey” (as they put it on their debut), inside the commuter suburb of Park Ridge. But their unconventional heredity shows: Mom and Dad met while acting in a play in Buffalo, eloped to Greenwich Village, then outgrew bohemia when it was time for a family.

“They never really did belong in the suburbs,” says Roche, speaking over the phone from the Village apartment she has lived in for more than a decade. “He taught people how to speak,” she adds. “How to go to job interviews, and how to talk to other people, and just to have the confidence to do that.” To be precise, Jack Roche taught elocution and rhetoric to an aspirant, often immigrant, working class. When he died in 1995, Suzzy took the opportunity to eulogize him on Holy Smokes, her understated yet moving solo debut.

On the new album, the paternal influence is expressed more subtly: Just as her father did in his profession, Roche approaches language as a malleable, material object—fit to be manipulated, true, but also to be enjoyed

and savored like any possession. These 12 songs are about *stuff*. In “To Alaska With Love,” for instance, Roche describes a “true love” situation as follows: “Their’s is a real thing/A dish in the sink.” It’s as solid a plank of poesy as William Carlos Williams could have asked for. Not that any misguided fealty to realism holds Roche’s imagination in check. She’s also capable of the fantastic: “Her arms grow/Like pipe cleaners with rubber bands inside/Only prettier.” There may be no ideas in things, but the language used to relay those ideas is, after all, a thing.

Roche’s close attention to the concrete is reflected in *Unmarried Housewife*’s title. “I’ve realized that the place where I find the meaning in my life is around ordinary chores and day-to-day living,” she explains. “What I’ve been doing all these years is raising a child and cleaning the toilets and making the beds. That’s the stuff of everyday life, and that’s what makes it great. Well, I don’t know about the toilets. Though thank God for whoever invented them.”

What makes Roche’s homey song cycle so relevant to the here and now is this: In an age when urban design is a code for the construction of glittery tourist traps, this music lets you imagine cities—and New York City in particular—as actual places where people live, eat, fall in love, and do laundry. The dreamlike escape of the Village that floated before the eyes of the Roches back when they were Jersey suburbanites is long gone; in conversation, Roche discusses projects that imply perpetual, practical busyness. She’s currently writing a song based on a Sam Shepard monologue, for example, which may grow into an interactive project examining the practice of prayer.

Rockers have always groused about folk’s “domestication” of a masculine restlessness that comes from electrified rebellion. In response, the worst sort of pseudo-folkies—a genteel tradition that yawns from James Taylor to Jewel—have linked acoustic guitars to self-indulgent confessions, disguising the clichéd results as “self-expression.” By contrast, Roche, like the best urban acoustic songwriters before her (Loudon Wainwright III to Amy Rigby) insists that a city can contain rock ‘n’ roll’s restlessness without neutralizing it, providing space for even the middle-aged and comparatively rooted to flex their adventurous side—especially when the road no longer offers an answer. “Some people gotta roam the earth/Never really fitting in,” Roche muses on “Sweetie Pie,” the album’s closing track. “A stranger to the very chair they’re sitting in.”

Beginning with an old song as distant from our lives as it is embedded in our prepubescent psyches, Roche ends with an infantile term of endearment that suggests that what we call our lovers is as important as anything else. Between the two, a tone of wonder pervades the album, a wonder stretched beyond merely a sense of childhood recalled. It marks something more: a re-enchantment with the world, as simple as finding the beauty in “Yankee Doodle.”

The Following review appeared in The New York Times, June 23, 2000

## Album of the Week

**SUZZY ROCHE:** “Songs From an Unmarried Housewife and Mother, Greenwich Village, U.S.A.” (Red House Records). Suzzy Roche still wears leg warmers—colorful striped ones on the cover of her second album away from the Roches, the trio of singing sisters who have helped define modern-day female bohemianism for 20 years. The Roche sisters, like those leg warmers, are loudly and wittily themselves, unworried about the fashion value of their eccentricities. Suzzy, the youngest, fully finds her subject matter on this carefully produced selection of folksy songs.

It’s all about lumpy love: prickly middle-aged couples and never-quite-lovers, babies on roller coasters and too-young expectant moms on commuter trains. Ms. Roche’s clean, conversational voice sounds just like a friend’s on the phone, telling idle stories that turn out to be unforgettable. With her sister Maggie and daughter Lucy on harmonies, and help from her friends Loudon Wainwright 3d, Jules Shear, David Mansfield and Curtis Stigers, Ms. Roche is still a sister anyone would want but one with a stance all her own. Suzzy Roche and friends play the Bottom Line, 15 West Fourth Street, at Mercer Street, Greenwich Village, (212) 228-7880, tomorrow at 7: 30 and 10: 30 p.m.; admission. is \$20.

ANN POWERS

The Following review appeared in New York, September 29, 1997

# NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 29, 1997

## Talent Swing Out, Sister

On her new album, *Holy Smokes*, Suzzy Roche muses on a “sweet ballerina,” asking, “How come I’m not one of those? / I do my dancing in combat boots / I don’t look good in a tutu.” Roche explains that “Pink Ballet Slippers”—whose nominal subject is the singer’s recent return, as a middle-aged woman, to ballet lessons—reflects “the importance of trying to do something creative and beautiful, even if it doesn’t suit your personality.” That impulse might also inform Roche’s decision strike out as a solo performer following two decades as the youngest third of the Roches. After all, the New York group’s main attraction has always been the heavenly, gymnastic harmonies in which Suzzy and her sisters, Maggie and Terre, deliver their quirky, sidelong pop. Singing with the Roches (who are on hiatus but not defunct) “is all about blending,” Suzzy notes. Going it alone, though, she has “no one to blend with. And I’m not the kind to seek out the spotlight.” For Roche, then, the process of becoming a solo musician has been a minor epiphany: “It’s a real chance to let the ego die.” All of which would seem to parallel the determined, unpolished dancer narrating “Pink Ballet Slippers”—except that Roche is a terrific, self-assured singer-songwriter. Her ready alto stands up just fine without sisterly accompaniment, her lyrics are more personal than the Roches’, and her melodic sense is as vivid. At the Bottom Line on September 24, it’ll be Suzzy and her acoustic guitar, without even the security of a backup band. Which, despite all the new album’s winning attributes, she says is still “like jumping off a cliff.”

Ethan Smith

The following review appeared in Q Magazine, October 1997

## **SUZZY ROCHE**

### **Holy Smokes**

RED HOUSE RHR CD 104

After 20 years as part of a trio, Suzzy, the youngest Roche sister, has taken time off to find her own voice again and express herself in a more personal way. *Holy Smokes* is the result, full of gentle rhythms, tasteful country fiddle and pedal steel, and warmed by understated harmonies. Many of the features that made *The Roches* so endearing—tunefulness, conversational style, clever constructions, telling details, compassion and quirky humour—can be found here too, but this is more intimate territory. There are songs about broken hearts, fear of the future, her daughter's first steps towards leaving home and a poem her mother, about Roche's childhood shyness, set to music. Best is *Pink Ballet Slippers*, a poignant waltz laced with wry humour about an adult's dreams of being a ballerina ("I do my dancing in combat boots, I don't look good in tutus"). Such reflections are unlikely to make a commercial splash but they will reward any who take them to heart. ★★★★★

Ian Cranna

The Following review appeared in BUZZ Weekly, Oct. 31, 1997

BUZZ Weekly (Oct. 31 – Nov. 6, 1997)

The Best Events and Entertainment in L.A.

**SUZZY ROCHE: HOLY SMOKES ★★★★★ (Red House)**

It seems odd that someone like Suzzy Roche is recording for little Red House Records in St. Paul. No offense to Red House—a fine label to which Greg Brown and Guy Davis, among others, belong—but, for all the female artists she has influenced, Suzzy Roche should be pulling down Madonna-like dollars at Warner Bros. (one of her former labels while with the Roches). Close your eyes while listening to “My My Broken Heart” or the heart-wrenching “Losing”—folky, acoustic, and emotionally exposed without a hint of mawkishness or hackneyed sentiment—and you’d swear Suzanne Vega just broke into your house, or Shawn Colvin, or Dar Williams, or Mary Chapin Carpenter, or Ani DiFranco... Thing is, after all these years and albums, Roche is still as fresh and relevant as any of them—and more so than most.