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It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. —Warren Buffett

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Fred Small with Barry Nickelsberg at the Waldo Theatre



Fred Small

On Thurs., Aug. 13, at 8 p.m., the Waldo Theatre will present Boston-area folksinger/songwriter Fred Small. The concert will be interpreted by internationally acclaimed sign language artist Barry Nickelsberg of Alna.

Hailed by Pete Seeger as "one of America's best songwriters", Fred Small sings songs of conscience in the tradition of Woody Guthrie, Phil Ochs, and Tom Paxton. Powerful, affecting, and inviting, Small's songs illuminate the goodness and courage of all kinds of people. His lullaby, "Everything Possible", written for a lesbian friend to sing to her nine-year-old son, has become an anthem for gay and lesbian choruses across the nation.

"You can be anybody you want to be, you can love whomever you will," the song goes. "You can live by yourself, you can gather friends around, you can choose one special one. And the only measure of your words and your deeds will be the love you leave behind when you're gone." That it has become so popular in the gay community "is very gratifying to me as a heterosexual," Small says. "That I would succeed in writing a song that touches so deeply a community to which I do not belong."

Fred Small knows how to write songs that get to the heart of things. His voice is strong and clear, his guitar playing is terrific, but his lyrics are what move people. The stories he weaves are of suffering and healing, of facing bigotry and claiming courage, and some of just plain raucous ridiculousness.

Small was born Nov. 6, 1952, in Plainfield, N.J. Grandnephew of Thomas Hart Benton, the American regionalist painter (and outstanding harmonica player), Small was playing guitar and singing folk songs by age seven. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Yale, Small earned a law degree and master's in natural resources policy at the University of Michigan. He wrote his first song in 1974 on the morning of his first law school examination. In 1980, Small left his position as staff

1,000 performances for a wide variety of musicals, including "Cabaret", "Sweeney Todd", "42nd Street", and "Jesus Christ, Superstar". He has also worked with such musical legends as Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Chuck Berry, Chubby Checker, and Lloyd Price. He has also interpreted rap artists, gospel choirs, and Irish musicians.

Nickelsberg first learned sign language on a lark some 20 years ago. While still a novice signer, he heard Aretha Franklin on the car radio and got inspired. "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, don't know what it means to me ..." He thought, "If I could just sign it as fast as she sings it." Today he sings with his fingers, and uses every other part of his body to mime, dance, and gesture so the meaning, the rhythm, and the emotion of a song are conveyed to his attentive audience. He sways, he rocks, he bops to the beat, but he rarely makes a sound.

This event is sponsored by Brann & Isaacson, Attorneys at Law, of Lewiston. Tickets are \$8 in advance for general seating and \$10 at the door; assigned seating is \$11, available by telephone only; and student tickets are \$5 by phone (832-6060) or at the door only.

General seating tickets are also available at Huston-Tuttle, Rockland; Thomaston Books & Prints; Clark's Drug Store, Waldoboro; and Maine Coast Books, Damariscotta.

The Waldo Theatre is handicapped-accessible and offers ample paved parking at the rear of the theater.

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1989, Small left his position as staff attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation to pursue his career in music full time. In September, 1990, Small entered Harvard Divinity School in preparation for Unitarian Universalist ministry. He continues to perform while in school and will include music as part of his ministry.

Barry Nickelsberg has worked as a sign language artist for the hearing unpaired for more than 17 years, and has interpreted for such popular festivals as the Kennedy Center Open House and the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival. Over the years Nickelsberg has interpreted over