

ACLU of Massachusetts to Sponsor First Anniversary Show 'Which Side?: A Protest Music Teach-Out' July 21 in Boston

Beloved Monthly Series Continues To Build Community Through Music, Conversation, and Collective Action

BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, July 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [ACLU](#) of Massachusetts will sponsor a special anniversary edition of [Which Side?](#), the beloved protest music series, on July 21, 2026, at the brand new Opera + Community Studios located at 15 Channel Center Street in Fort Point.

The venue, operated by the [Boston Lyric Opera](#), offers a larger capacity to accommodate the growing demand for this unique community gathering.



Which Side First Anniversary Show Takes Place July 21 In Boston

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Carol Rose, executive director of the ACLU of Massachusetts

The series has held 12 monthly shows at the Cambridge's Lizard Lounge and the Burren in Somerville over the past year, consistently reaching full capacity. The enthusiasm from the audience indicates a strong desire to gather, listen, engage, and connect through the power of music and conversation.

Inspired by James Sullivan's book *Which Side Are You On?: 20th Century American History in 100 Protest Songs*, the series uses historic protest music as a launching point for live performance and dialogue about the role songs play in movements for justice, resistance, and social change. Each month, performers present one song connected to the

themes and history explored in Sullivan's book alongside an original protest song, drawing connections between past struggles and the present moment.

Produced by Joyce Linehan, Jon Lupfer, and Sullivan, the 90-minute program combines live

music, commentary, and audience participation, creating a space that is equal parts concert, teach-in, and community gathering.

"A year into this project, people are coming out not just for the songs, but for the feeling in the room, the sense that music and art can still help us understand each other, build solidarity, and create moments of joy and resilience together," said Linehan.

"The Which Side concert series embodies two of my core convictions: Building community is the key to defeating authoritarianism. And freedom is always more fun—especially when it involves great music," said Carol Rose, executive director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. "We're thrilled to be sponsoring this inspiring anniversary concert. Join us for a remarkable evening—and when the last note fades, think about how you can do your part to show up for your neighbors, your values, and your democracy. Because it really will take all of us."

The ACLU of Massachusetts is sponsoring the July 21 anniversary concert as part of its "Beyond 250: Dare to Create" initiative, which aims to spark conversation on ways to strengthen democracy and expand freedom.

Hosted by Sullivan and Linehan, the concert will feature the Which Side house band – The Paid Protesters – backing six guest performers:

The OG's (Original Gentlemen) are a Boston-based R&B vocal group whose sound is rooted in the timeless harmonies of classic soul. The group features Albert "Shorty Mac" Brown, Jabir Pope, and Josh Fernandes, each of whom spent years incarcerated before returning home and channeling their experiences into music that speaks to resilience, redemption, and hope. Known



Author James Sullivan at Which Side? at The Burren earlier this year



Thea Hopkins, a member of Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe, performing at a recent "Which Side" night.

for their rich vocal blend and emotional depth, the OG's create performances that are both entertaining and deeply moving, whether singing beloved classics or original songs like "I Cry Freedom."

Brandie Blaze is a hip hop artist from Boston, Massachusetts. Inspired by female rappers such as Lil' Kim and Missy Elliot, Blaze's raw lyrics and dynamic stage presence allow her to compete with the boys and rep for the ladies. An activist and self-proclaimed "trap feminist," her hard-hitting bars are how she stands up for herself and Black women everywhere.



Singer/songwriter Will Daley (2nd fr L) and Chad Stokes (Dispatch) at a recent Which Side? at The Burren

The Rubin Brothers – AJ and Colescott – are time-traveling musical entertainers with a whimsical flair for vaudeville & circus. They performed on "American Idol" in 2024 and play sold-out shows for audiences of all ages. They both received full scholarships to Berklee College of Music, where Colescott now teaches.

Todd Thibaud is a Vermont-born, Boston-based singer-songwriter whose songs are a slice of what life is really like: the pains and pleasures, love lost, and life reborn. Inspired by Elvis Costello, Neil Finn, Johnny Cash, and John Hiatt, Thibaud has built a sound that is entirely his own. His music features elements of Americana, folk, country, and roots rock, making it seem at once familiar and new.

Melissa Ferrick is 30 years into a prolific career as a genre- and gender-defying songwriter who continues to disrupt normative categorization. Indie, alternative, folk, punk: Melissa Ferrick won't be labeled. With disarming wit and raw vulnerability, every lyric in Ferrick's immense catalog is an invitation to confession or catharsis.

Elisa Birdseye is a classically trained violist who also plays Americana and pop music with local bands including the Boston ILL Harmonic and the Richie Parsons Band. Her songwriting is inspired by an early love of the Weavers, Joan Baez, the Beatles, the Band, and the music of social justice protests of the '60s and '70s.

The anniversary show lineup is indicative of the breadth and depth of the eclectic lineups throughout the year, which have included artists Ezra Furman, Naomi Westwater, Veronica Robles, Robin Lane, Will Dailey, Chad Stokes, Tanya Donnelly, Sarah Borges, Mercedes Escobar, Yaryna Tsymbal, the "Damaged Gods" (featuring members of the band Gang of Four), and many others, creating a vibrant space for community connection and artistic expression.

“Protest songs have always helped people make sense of turbulent times, and over the past year we’ve been proud to help friends both old and new make some sense of this crazy world we’re living in,” said Sullivan.

In addition to the musical artists, the series has featured an impressive lineup of speakers, including Dr. Emmett Price III, Maya Wiley, Imari Paris-Jeffries, Rahsaan Hall, Danny Goldberg, and Rose.

Kade Crockford, director of technology and justice programs at the ACLU of Massachusetts, will speak at the anniversary concert.

This show is happening in partnership with the Boston Lyric Opera, in their beautiful new “civic arts space.” The Boston Lyric Opera’s caterer will curate a special limited menu exclusively for the event, and a bar will be available, selling beer and wine.

Event Details:

Date & Time: July 21, 2026, at 8:00 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)

Location: Opera + Community Studios, 15 Channel Center Street, Fort Point, MA

Admission: Pay-what-you-want (minimum \$5). Contributions will support performers, direct costs, and event staff. Given the popularity of the shows, advance reservations are highly recommended. Reservations open Thursday, July 9 at noon.

All ages are welcome. Lineup subject to change without notice.

For more information and to reserve a spot, visit www.whichside.boston.

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