

Joy Katzen-Guthrie, Passages (Tune-of-the-Century Music) ★★★ This Bay area resident has a powerful, righteous warble. Her pictures appear on this CD, first as a youngster peeking from beneath a baby blanket to that full-frontal grin on a 5-year-old face to a long, learned look from the front of her compilation disc.

Wonder may be displayed on that face. But it is wisdom delivered by a confident voice that makes this album such a proud, professional triumph — which, when you realize that she is a full-time performer, writer and music producer, comes as absolutely no surprise. The music here is full of personal revelation and celebratory wonder, but it is refreshingly happy in its absolutes. And groovy, too.

Hold it, a happy album? When was the last time you heard one of those? Free of angst, minus preachy platitudes, Katzen-Guthrie manages what so few singers do — to make you feel hopeful without being weighed down by sickly sentiment. She sings her anthems softly, mixed in with groovy guitars, cool cellos and all sorts of other instruments, showcasing a voice that has rare sing-a-long quality.

Yes, you can imagine her in front of a congregation of folksy truth tellers. Or on a Broadway stage. She can kick it up (“Freeway of Life”) and lay it down (“Sweet Friend, Dear Friend”). Her music and message also has found its way into a national educational program called “Of Musical Note.”

It’s clearly no surprise she received a grant from the Pinellas County Arts Council in 1997. Now the question is: Where’s that major label record contract?

— Jennifer Barrs