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Activist folk music brings discussion to union Forum Hall

By **Abdurahman Basha** - Sep 11, 2015

The group Magpie, formed of activists and folk musicians Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner, performed a series of songs from the civil rights movement era Thursday in Forum Hall.

The themes of the songs were the anti-war movement, and issues of racism and gender inequality.

The performance, named "Civil disobedience in America: Songs and Perspectives," was aimed at bringing forth the history behind many of the social issues still seen today.

One particular song written and performed by the activist duo, "Not so far from the Mississippi clay" compares today's incidents of racism against African Americans with the days of the civil rights movement. Artzner said the song is about a time when some African Americans were murdered, tied to heavy objects, and thrown into the Mississippi river and were later uncovered during the Freedom Summer project of 1964.

The show, however, did not take on a serious tone throughout. The band played humorous pieces such as that of Phil Ochs and Draft Dodger Rag.

Marci Maullar, associate professor in the school of music, theater and dance, obtained Academic Excellence Funding from the Office of the Provost to help bring the group to K-State. The performance was also sponsored by the Ebony Theatre.

Artzner and Leonino were joined on stage by president of Ebony Theater, Darrington Clark, and vice president Nicole Casonhua, who performed readings by historical icons such as Susan B. Anthony, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Maullar said talking about social justice in music has a unique significance and that booking Artzner and Leonino was something she had been trying to do for a while.

"Anytime you can use the arts to bring focus and attention to a subject, it seems to have a great impact because it's done in such a way that people are more likely to listen rather than have somebody just stand up and lecture or just news," Maullar said.

Artzner said that one of the band's missions is to break down what is known as white privilege through music.

"This show is just about human beings all being equal, and the music

in our program is here for the breaking down of class and privilege and leveling the playing field for all people," Artzner said.

Leonino spoke about the power of music and how it's not necessarily a new platform but an old one that needs to be used more often.

"Songs have been used throughout history from the underground railroad and all the way up through the civil rights movement and beyond," Leonino said. "Music has been used in movements to get people to come together and organize against injustices and unjust laws and laws that are called legal but should be illegal."

Magpie has been touring and performing for 43 years and throughout their career were able to perform on major stages and at major musical venues such as the Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap and the Philadelphia, Winnipeg, Mariposa and Old Songs folk festivals. The show was followed by a question and answer and a discussion session between the performers and audience members and all together lasted a little over two hours.