

And it was The Burns Sisters who literally and metaphorically brought it all back home for me. Based in Ithaca, N.Y., they hail from my nearby hometown of Binghamton, where their father was the Democratic mayor in my youth during the 1960s. A large Irish Catholic family of a dozen kids, they were like our local Kennedys, though thankfully without the fatal curse and serious strain of substance abuse. (To wit, their father, John Burns, worked on the Robert Kennedy campaign for president.)

Where so many others of my generation have forsaken the spirit of the 1960s, the lovely and exceptionally talented Burns Sisters are diligently applying their gorgeous and magical three-part harmonies, among a number of other gifts, to the cause. I last heard them back in August at Camp Casey in Crawford, where, on the final Sunday of Cindy Sheehan's vigil, they sang a rosary with Martin Sheen (my President) for her son Casey and all the other American soldiers who have died in the senseless war in Iraq.

This time, the sisters -- who have made quite a good name for themselves in the folk world -- were like the angels of political and social hope bringing light through the dark clouds of post-9/11 America. Their take on "God's Promise," a Woody Guthrie lyric set to music by Ellis Paul, is a gorgeous hymn for humanity. Conversely, their performance of Guthrie's "Vigilante Man" during a Woody tribute showed how three beautiful voices can be wielded like the sharp edge of a sword.

The sisters showcased material from their next album, which promises to be the sort of music we sorely need in these turbulent times of conflict and confusion. Their stirring take on Leonard Cohen's "Democracy" offers tangible optimism that the electoral times just might be a changin'. Marie's "Bring Them Home" supports the troops in the best way possible by wishing for the safe return of those Americans placed in harm's way by the twisted policies of the Bush administration. And though The Burns Sisters are admittedly lapsed former Catholic schoolgirls, the heavenly way they sing Andrew Lloyd Weber's requiem "Pie Jesu" shows that they have a direct line to the divine.

It's all to be heard someday soon on an album currently in progress and tentatively titled Wild Bouquet. Check them out at www.burnssisters.com, where further news on what promises to be one of the strongest political albums of our troubled times will be posted as it nears completion and release. Meanwhile, look for them on tour with Arlo Guthrie later this year.

And Marie, Annie and Jeannie aren't the only members of the Burns family who are willing to put their genuine morals where their mouths are to try to stem the madness of the Bush war machine. Their younger brother Danny is one of the St. Patrick's Four -- Catholic lay workers who, on March 17, 2003, poured blood on the entrance to a military recruiting station in Ithaca and the proverbially tattered American flag to protest the senseless spilling of the very stuff of life (www.stpatricksfour.org). They were sentenced for their righteous and religiously-inspired act of civil disobedience in the great American tradition in a federal court in our mutual hometown of Binghamton by a judge whose family, like the Burns clan and the Pattersons, came from the same social milieu. Danny is now serving a six-month jail sentence in a federal lockup in Brooklyn.

I'm proud that my homegirls and their brother who hail from the place where I came of age and into political consciousness are standing up to be counted in solidarity with all of us who seek peace, justice, sanity and genuine democracy. God bless the Burns family for doing their part. Now let's all of us join them at the ramparts to sing for a better America and world at large.

Rob Patterson is an entertainment writer in Austin, Texas. Email orca@io.com.