The Ani DiFranco appearing at the Capitol Theatre on Saturday might not be the same Ani DiFranco who became something of a legend over the past two decades.

The old Ani averaged a record a year from 1989 through 2006, toured incessantly, and was a punkish-folk, feminist, do-it-yourself, and bisexual icon.

The new Ani has a nearly-18-month-old child and a "baby daddy" (her words, referring to producer Mike Napolitano), and will be releasing her first studio album in *two whole years* in September:
Red Letter Year
.

Her description of the record is vague, but it's instructive in how *populated* it is.

"It's big," DiFranco said last week. "It's big. It's a big record for me. There's lots of people on it making lots of sounds, which is cool for me. I've made my last bunch of records in a small, solitary way, and this one is much more lavish. There's string sections, there's brass bands, my new touring band is in effect, and then a lot of guests. ...

"I spent a bunch of years kind of alone, and working a lot of stuff out. And so the music was coming from that solitary place. And I feel like I've come through the other side. I'm happy again. ...

"I'm keeping great company these days, and I'm feeling happier and more out of my shell, so it just seemed like the most natural way to make a record was to have a party."

DiFranco said the pace of her work has slackened in many ways. She's touring for weeks at a time instead of months, and her daughter has been a welcome distraction: "She's slowed down my writing ... quite significantly. I say that without regret. ... I'm just somebody who's spent 20 years dedicating my self to my work. To shift and put my energy somewhere else for now feels really good, and I think will benefit my work in the end.

"This record is two years in the making as opposed to my usual two minutes, and you can hear it. It's a much better thought out and constructed and realized record than a lot of them."

DiFranco's life has been full of changes. She said she moved to New Orleans five years ago - she grew up in Buffalo, New York - and bought a house there after Hurricane Katrina. (Her 2006 studio album *Reprieve* was patched together in Buffalo after DiFranco was forced to leave the Crescent City.)

"New Orleans I find endlessly inspiring, even in its current state of disarray," she said, and she

felt an obligation to the city. "Whenever you have a great injury, you have to go there with your energy, with your whatever, with your money, with your love."

That year, DiFranco was also sidelined by tendinitis - which kept her from touring for the better part of a year.

Her pregnancy provided a productive break. DiFranco said she stopped touring during her seventh month and resumed when her daughter was five months old, bringing the baby along. During that hiatus, she put together *Canon*, a retrospective that distills her intimidating catalog to a still-intimidating 36 tracks. (As usual, *Canon* was released on her own Righteous Babe imprint, and she was a successful independent artist long before the major-label system began collapsing.)

The collection underscores that DiFranco is an inventive, liquid songwriter and a nimble performer, whose forceful politics and often-aggressive acoustic guitar are balanced by appropriately sensitive arrangements and sharp observations ("I'm a good kisser / And you're a fast learner / And that kinda thing could float us / For a pretty long time"). If it's not a coherent summary, that's a function of the voluminous body of work.

"It was a little overdue," she said. "It was just something that I never got around to."

Her pregnancy provided her with the opportunity to compile *Canon* and a book of poetry, *Verses*. "I promised myself I would do my homework" during her break, she said.

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