

## Lesbians and



## Music, Drama, and Art

Publisher: Sinister Wisdom, Inc.

Sinister Wisdom 64  
Spring 2005

Editor: Fran Day

Layout and Design: Kim P. Fusch

Board of Directors: Susan Levinkind, Joan Nestle, Carla Volpe, Judith K. Witherow, Fran Day

Volunteer Coordinator: Susan Levinkind

Proofreaders: Fran Day and Sandy Tate

Web Design: Carla Volpe

Mailing Crew for 63: Linda Bacci, Fran Day, Carolyn DeTierra, Roxanna Fiamma, Casey Fisher, Marjorie Gayle, Linda Johnson, Susan Levinkind, Karen Kibler, Barbara Link, Moire Martin, Jan Shade, Stacey Shade, Sandy Tate, Terry Zizzo-Decker.

Special thanks to: Tee A. Corinne, Roxanna N. Fiamma and Rose Provenzano.

Front Cover Art: Virginia R. Harris: Either/Or: 81.5 inches x 94.5 inches. All cotton. Machine pieced and quilted. Warm and natural batting. The pattern is an adaptation of a Kuba design from Zaire, 1993.

Back Cover Art: Photo by Jean Weisinger, 1993: Angela Wellman, Trombonist.

**SINISTER WISDOM**, founded 1976

Former editors and publishers:

Harriet Ellenberger (aka Desmoines)

And Catherine Nicholson (1976-1981)

Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-1983)

Michaele Uccella (1983-1984)

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-1987)

Elana Dykewomon (1987-1994)

Caryatis Cardea (1991-1994)

Akiba Onada-Sikwoia (1995-1997)

Margo Mercedes Rivera-Weiss (1997-2000)

*Sinister Wisdom* is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world.

Copyright ©2005 Sinister Wisdom, Inc.

All rights revert to individual authors and artists.

ISSN: 0196-1853. Printed in the U. S. on recycled paper.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703, USA  
[www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://www.sinisterwisdom.org)

16220

spring 2005 1

# A Journal by and for Lesbians

## Contents

- 4 Fran Day. Notes for a Magazine
- 5 Upcoming Issues: Call for Submissions
- 8 Laura Aguilar. Artist's Statement: Photography
- 10 Sierra Lonepine Briano. Dedicated to Making Art
- 10 Sheridan Gold. Ashiko
- 11 Barbara Ester. My Personal Journey into Lesbian Music and Culture
- 15 zana. faces of myself
- 17 Cris Williamson. Introduction to the Songbook
- 18 Cris Williamson. Remember When
- 18 Cris Williamson. He-She Girl
- 20 Tee A. Corinne. Friends When You Need Them
- 23 Rose Marcario. Reflections on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production of Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*
- 26 Carolyn Gage. The Drum Lesson
- 33 Sandy Tate. Interview with Mary Watkins
- 40 Marjorie Norris. Anima, Spirit
- 41 Ann Hackler. The Institute for the Musical Arts
- 43 Sudie Rakusin. Art in Print
- 44 Ferron. Courting the Muse: Sentimental Education
- 48 Virginia R. Harris. Artist's Statement: Fabric Art
- 50 Tangren Alexander. How Lesbian Music Changed My Life and Lesbian Art Sustained It
- 52 Jean Weisinger. A Photographer's Journey
- 54 Reign. The heart drums
- 54 Reign. Why Music for Women?
- 55 Sarita Johnson. Reflections on the Poster for A Lesbian Art Exhibit
- 56 Happy/L. A. Hyder. Vivid
- 58 Judy Freespirit. The First National Lesbian Feminist Conference
- 61 Becky Banasiak Code. Georgia O'Keeffe: Releasing the Spirit
- 64 Becky Banasiak Code. New Mexico Road
- 66 Alix Dobkin. The Adventures of Lavender Jane
- 69 Alix Dobkin. The Further Adventures of Lavender Jane
- 71 Ruth Mountaingrove. Lesbian and Art
- 74 Mary Meriam. Sonata
- 77 Ona Maraé. A Song of the Soul

per  
S616E  
I923  
no. 64-67  
2005-2006

RECEIVED

JUN 03 2005

DUKE UNIVERSITY LIB

- 79 Susan Keleher. Sculptural Movement  
82 Kristan Aspen. Oregon Women's Culture  
90 Jean Sirius. An Inadvertent Artist  
92 Jean Taylor. Lesbian Performances Downunder  
94 Bethroot Gwynn. Theaterwomon  
100 Jamie Anderson. Women's Music Saved My Life  
104 Kathleen Allen. Somewhere Deep Within  
108 Jess McVey. How Did I Get Here?  
109 Bonnie J. Morris. When Lesbians Ruled the World  
111 Lilith Lynn Rogers. A Lusty Melody  
  
113 Contributors' Notes  
120 Book Review: *Minus One: A Twelve-Step Journey* by Bridget Bufford  
reviewed by Lori L. Lake  
121 Books Received / Lesbian Art Books  
122 Announcements  
127 Back Issues  
128 Subscription Form

## ART

- Front Cover: Virginia R. Harris: Either/Or  
Back Cover: Jean Weisinger: Angela Wellman, Trombonist  
3 Jess McVey: Untitled Sculpture 1 (Photo by Judy Reed)  
7 Laura Aguilar: Stillness #16  
9 Laura Aguilar: Nature Self-Portrait #7  
16 zana: Untitled  
20 Tee A. Corinne: Composite  
21 Tee A. Corinne: Photograph of Irene Pérez  
21 Tee A. Corinne: Photograph of Pell and Woman Crafts West  
22 Tee A. Corinne: Photograph of Barbara Cameron  
22 Tee A. Corinne: Photograph of Lenore Chinn  
25 Sudie Rakusin: Untitled-1  
33 Roxanna N. Fiamma: Photograph of Mary Watkins and Sandy Tate  
39 Karen Cooper: Photograph of Mary Watkins  
43 Sudie Rakusin: Awaiting My Muse  
48 Virginia R. Harris: Confluence  
49 Virginia R. Harris: Retrofit 11  
53 Jean Weisinger: Self-Portrait: Seeing Myself Through Alice Walker's  
Eyes  
55 Sarita Johnson: Poster: For the Love of Women: A Lesbian Art  
Exhibit

- 65 Sudie Rakusin: Untitled-2  
76 Sudie Rakusin: Untitled-3  
91 Jean Sirius: Car, Leaf  
99 Hawk Madrone: Bethroot Gwynn in "Immaculate Decision"  
107 Jess McVey: Untitled Sculpture 2 (Photo by Judy Reed)  
108 Jess McVey: Untitled Sculpture 3 (Photo by Judy Reed)  
112 Grace Berge. Photograph of Gwen Avery

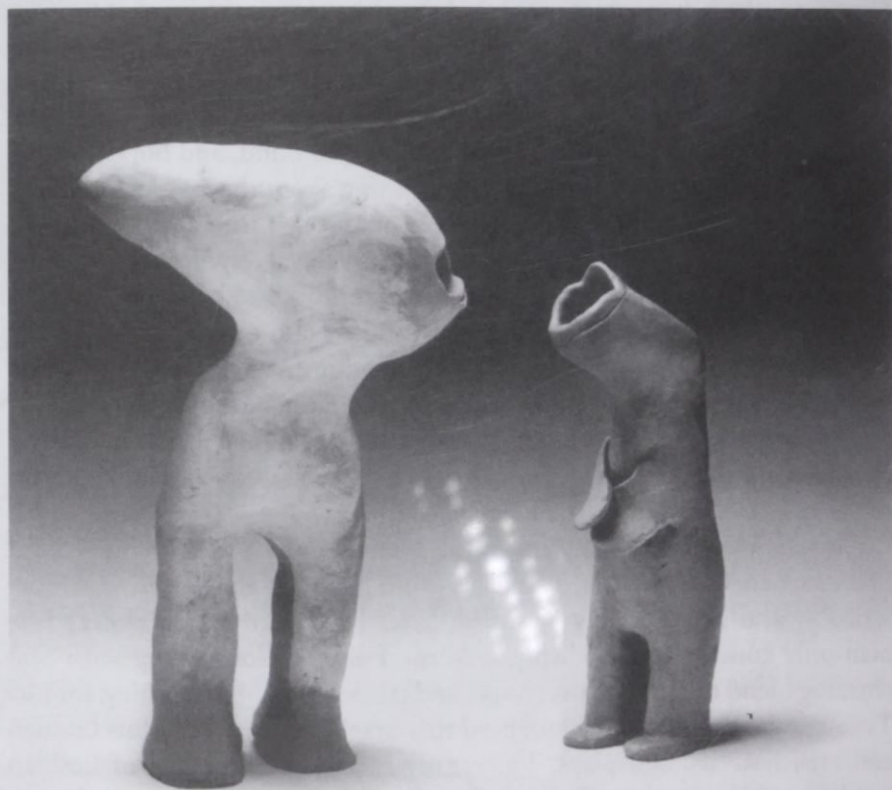


Photo by Judy Reed

Jess McVey- "Untitled Sculpture 1"

## Notes for a Magazine

*"We believe that writing of a certain consciousness has greater impact when it's collected, when several voices give weight, harmony, and counter melody to the individual message."*

Harriet Desmoines in *Sinister Wisdom* # 1

This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* celebrates Lesbian music and art and the role the creative arts have played in building community and in exploring, affirming, and reflecting who we are as Lesbians.

How have our lives been touched by art, music, dance, and drama? The pieces in this issue frame important questions about the political potential of the visual and performing arts to inspire us as individuals and to change the world. Some contributors write about how their lives were changed forever by attending a Lesbian concert. Others examine how they gradually unlearned the early messages that told them that art is something we do during playtime and that is only used to decorate buildings. Those narrow definitions threatened to stifle the artist in each of us; how some Lesbians rebelled and redefined (and continue to redefine) art is exciting, profound, and hopeful.

The artists and musicians in these pages sing about the joys and struggles in our Lesbian communities; they also cry out against the injustices and inequalities in our society. Many feel that it is their ethical responsibility to bring urgent issues to our table for vigorous examination. These collective voices—the personal journeys and the political paths—expand our understanding of ourselves and each other. May they also ignite our imaginations and creative energies as we continue the important work of building Lesbian culture.

We acknowledge the strength and courage of Lesbian artists and musicians around the world and throughout time. We salute each of them for the beauty and wisdom of their work.

It was at a Margie Adam concert in Denver during the seventies that I first experienced the magic. The energy and power in that room was indescribably and unforgettably beautiful. Later I attended Linda Shear's Lesbian-only concert at the Michigan Music Festival. Connecting with that amazing blend of Lesbian love, hope, and passion was life-changing for me. Through the years I have experienced that magic during numerous Lesbian concerts, festivals, and plays. The creativity and perseverance of Lesbian musicians and artists sustain me and inspire me to continue my work.

Fran Day  
Sebastopol, California  
2005

---

## Upcoming Issues

See submission guidelines on the inside back cover.  
Please help spread the word about these themes.

### #65 Lesbian Mothers and Grandmothers

Deadline: May 1, 2005

Guest Editor: Merry Gangemi

Short fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and art that explores and celebrates lesbian mothers and grandmothers (including lesbians who adopt and lesbians who are co-parents). Fiction and non-fiction should be double-spaced. Font should be Georgia. Short legible handwritten work will be considered. No more than ten pages for fiction and non-fiction. No more than five poems per submission. Name and phone number or email top right of each page. Submissions on disk are fine, but must be in MS Word or Corel WordPerfect for PC.

**Submissions for 65 only** should be sent to: Merry Gangemi, 985 East Hill Road, Marshfield, VT 05658 or email [mgangemi@sover.net](mailto:mgangemi@sover.net)

### # 66 Lesbian Activists

Deadline: August 1, 2005

Editor: Fran Day

Activists, this is our issue. What areas of activism are we involved in? What forms is our activism taking and how has this changed through the years (if at all)? How and why did we get involved in the work we are doing? What strategies have we tried that worked and which ones didn't and why? How do we keep hope alive? What ways have we found to inspire/encourage other Lesbians to be politically active? What ways do our personal lives — our childhood experiences, our class and/or racial/ethnic identities, whether we are disabled or able-bodied, old or young, live in urban or rural areas — reflect in our political work? What galvanizes us (music, art, drama, literature, actions, etc.) to continue the struggle? What work are we doing to protect the earth, to promote peace, to combat lesbophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, classism, ageism, looksism, size oppression, sexism, and/or ableism etc.? Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover very carefully.

### #67 Lesbians and Work

Deadline: December 1, 2005

Editor: Fran Day

As Lesbians, how do we cope with heterosexism, lesbophobia, ageism, racism, classism, ableism and other oppressive policies and attitudes at work? How do we maintain our integrity (asserting our needs, defending our rights) without being penalized or losing our jobs? How do we cope with work that we find degrading, unethical, boring, stressful, dangerous, disabling, and/or unsatisfying? How do we cope with the myth that there is meaningful, well-paid work out there for everyone if we only try hard enough? What experiences have we had with successful alliances with other Lesbians at work? What positive experiences have we had at work where we felt we were doing something useful, where we were acknowledged for our unique contributions, and/or where we had a reasonable workload, healthy working conditions, and adequate compensation and benefits? What can be done to improve the work world for Lesbians and other oppressed people? Other work topics: unions, exploitation of workers, having to work as a child, while chronically ill, while caregiving a sick/disabled partner, and/or finding ways to sustain ourselves outside the patriarchal work world, etc. **Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover very carefully.**

### #68 Call for Guest Editor:

Please contact Fran Day at [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net) for more information.





Laura Aguilar- "Stillness #16" ©1999

Laura Aguilar

## Artist's Statement: Photography

I am a mostly self-taught photographer. My photography has always provided me with an opportunity to open myself up and see the world around me. And most of all, photography makes me look within.

I have learned so much about myself through the women in the Latina Lesbian series. The series is an ongoing project started in August of 1986. At present I have 30 photos, but would like to increase that to 100. At that point I may feel done with the series. In the end, I would like to put the series into book form.

The series began when I was asked to put together a body of work which showed a positive image of Latina Lesbians for a mental health conference dealing with Latins. The conference was held in my hometown, Los Angeles, and the series reflects images of Lesbians living there.

What I am trying to do with the series is to provide a better understanding of what it's like to be a Latina and a Lesbian by showing images which allow us the opportunity to share ourselves openly, and to provide role models that break negative stereotypes and help develop a better bridge of understanding. I also hope that the pieces provide the opportunity to explore ourselves and others, and to express our own beauty, strength and dignity.

Within the Lesbian and Gay community of Los Angeles, people of color are yet another hidden subculture; we are present, but remain unseen. Through the work on this series, I have found this subculture to be a caring and diverse community of women who are quite proud and connected to their heritage.

I decided to add language; that was the only way I could see myself saying anything about being Latina or Lesbian, and it's working out. However, adding language makes the process harder for me. I have dyslexia, so reading, writing, and understanding is very frustrating. Most of the women used handwriting which is even more difficult to figure out. It has been and continues to be quite a challenge, but when I see the series work, I get a great deal of satisfaction.

My artistic goal is to create photographic images that compassionately render the human experience, revealed through the lives of individuals in the lesbian/gay and/or persons of color communities. My work is a collaboration between the sitters and myself, intended to be viewed by a cross-

cultural audience. Hopefully the universal elements in the work can be recognized by other individuals' communities and can initiate the viewer to new experiences about gays, lesbians and people of color.



Laura Aguilar "Nature Self-Portrait #7" ©1996

Sierra Lonepine Briano

## Dedicated to Making Art

I am a 58 year old dyke living at ArtSprings, twelve beautiful acres in Oregon. ArtSprings is a retreat for women artists and writers. My life has been dedicated to making art for the past twenty years. Before that I kept thinking I was something other than an artist, so I spent time being a hippy, raising my son, traveling around and trying to figure out what to be when I grew up. When I finally accepted the fact that I didn't want to grow up, I was able to accept myself as an artist, which I guess was a grown up thing to do!! In addition to painting and drawing, I make paper out of the left overs in my garden and other natural fibers, and I have a fabric design business. I take my wares to markets and art festivals. Despite the fact that being queer is the "in" thing these days, I find that as a Lesbian Artist it is still hard to get work into mainstream venues (if I choose to do that). Much of my imagery is Lesbian or Dyke specific and therefore not "acceptable" in mainstream situations. I do sometimes have the desire to break through existing barriers and show my work to folks whose awareness would be broadened by seeing it. In the meantime, I'm a happy dyke living close to nature, growing my garden, taking my wares to market and teaching painting and paper-making classes. This is my life and it is what I plan to do for the rest of it.

Sheridan Gold

### Ashiko\*

*Her face is soft yet her voice, so firm and strong.  
Her mouth, always open, yells from her depths,*

*Listen to me!  
Feel me!  
Your heart beats with mine!  
We are one!*

*Her body sways  
As we move in unison  
To the rhythm  
To the heartbeat  
Of Africa*

*Of the ancestors  
For the tears  
For the land  
For the dancers  
For the trance  
For the vision of the world,  
Floating in syncopation.*

\*Ashiko is the name of a drum. Its tone is lower than a little djembe, but higher than a conga drum.

Barbara Ester

## My Personal Journey into Lesbian Music and Culture

I'm asking myself to write: to gather my thoughts and memories and share them on paper. I am passionate about our Lesbian culture and feel proud and honored to have been and still be a part of creating such richness. The richness is the value of my connections, with my lover, with past lovers, with old friends and new friends and along with that, developing the utmost in self-esteem, self-love and creative expression. The journey hasn't always been easy. It has included many challenges, carping and inner reflection. It has also included loving support and comfort from other Lesbians who share insights, values, honor, and trust.

When I first came out as Lesbian in 1969, my lover introduced me to her friends. They were the only Lesbians I knew. Occasionally when we got together we played music; we played guitar, and drums and made up our own songs. I wouldn't have called it 'Lesbian music' at the time but that was the foundation on all that was to come. Of the many facets of our culture that have touched me and connected me to a larger community, it has been the music, which has moved me most deeply.

I attended Columbia College in Chicago as a theater major and sang at the Body Politic in several rock musicals. The lyrics and themes of the performances were political and reflective of the times, shows for civil rights and peace. As radical feminist identified Lesbians entered my life, I developed a new awareness of the limited roles of women in theater. On my long walks along the lakefront I often sang. I remember becoming aware of a freedom I felt outside of the theater and a deep longing to sing my own sounds and songs.

One evening I went to hear Linda Shear and the Family of Woman band in concert. Her words "Woman, I can touch you ... I can love you" filled me with inspiration and delight and waves of questions. She sang from her heart, her center and her truth. Her courage touched me. I was a Lesbian but in the theater I wasn't singing about my own life. I knew it was time to change direction. A few weeks later I headed back to San Francisco for another theater performance.

The first evening I was there, I met Joan, another member of the cast, and began a deep soul searching journey to find 'my music'. Joan shared a dream of creating a woman's band and asked me to join her. We moved to San Diego with a strong commitment to our new journey in 'women's music'. There were many intense and challenging times that led to new insights and awareness as we surrounded ourselves with women's books and periodicals. We wrote and recorded a few songs and shared them with the community of Lesbians we found at the YWCA. We read radical Lesbian feminist theory. We were moved

by Mary Daly, Jill Johnston and the Furies. We found an ad for "Lavender Jane Loves Women" in Ms. magazine. That was the first album with powerful Lesbian affirming lyrics we embraced.

We saw an ad for a woman only concert with Margie Adam in Los Angeles and decided to go. The auditorium was full of women who mostly looked like us, like Lesbians. It was a high-spirited evening. The audience response was awesome, exciting and very inspiring! A few months later we were in LA again for another concert with Judy Grahn, Cris Williamson, Vickie Randall, and Margie Adam. It was Judy Grahn who spoke the word "Lesbian" in "A Woman is Talking to Death." I felt a deep connection upon hearing those words. They gave me identity and a realization of the importance of that acknowledgment, the strength and power in naming ourselves. Alix Dobkin performed in San Diego and brought east coast radical Lesbian wit and wisdom to me. Her strong voice also sang the word 'Lesbian' and invited us to sing along. Alix gave me the gift of self-love and acceptance in the power of word and naming. I will never forget the feeling of singing out loud and proud for the first time.

Around this same time Las Hermanas, a women's coffeehouse came into being. It was in full swing and full of Lesbians and women most weekends. These were exciting times. I truly felt we were interconnected to a powerful movement, a community engaged, and an emerging Lesbian culture. I felt energized and full! This was much greater than our idea of a woman's band. Las Hermanas presented poets, musicians, filmmakers, artists of all kinds, and very good food. I especially remember their Amazon sandwich! When Meg Christian came and sang "gayest of all," the tide of connection and commonality was compelling! My friend Joan became the local distributor for Olivia records. We went to various women's events and record stores and to anyone who would listen to and help promote this new 'women's music'. By the fall of 1975 we had created one of the first women's music festivals for women on women owned land! I dug holes for the posts for the stage. I stayed up into the night sewing armbands. I watched the gate at night and held the tarp over the performers when the rains came and cleaned the land after the festival ended. We had created a safe Lesbian space for the arts, communication, connections, and community! This was Lesbian culture. There was power and purpose in what we were creating.

Joan and I met Martha and Lucy at Las Hermanas and felt a common bond through our music and radical ideas. They came to read from their book "The Ripening Fig." They were also musicians and had recorded their music on an earlier album, "A Few Loving Women." They were from the east coast and were headed to Miami. They invited and enticed us to come join them in south Florida, to the everglades and Miami Beach!

Being true Lesbian hippies, we traveled in our VW van cross-country. We

arrived in Miami in May 1976 just prior to 'Lesbian Pride week'. Martha and Lucy directed us to the Lesbian Task Force of NOW. I will always treasure the friendly welcome and full support we felt as we walked into a large circle of Lesbians meeting at the YWCA. It was an awesome week of activity and entertainment, crafts and food sharing and began some of my most enduring and loving connections with my new Lesbian friends.

I began to write more of my own songs and felt nurtured and supported by the voices and percussive sounds of these Miami Dykes. There were many evenings of going to Maryanne and F Louise's home, into their living room full of sound and music making. My creative spirit was delighted and happy. I was singing my life! I felt empowered and impassioned and healthy in this new land accented by coconuts, mangos and ocean waters. I felt the sweet support of Mindy sharing songs and urging me to sing. We made journeys to the Pagoda in St. Augustine, Florida, for more soul connections and creative adventures. I felt alive and vibrant!

Inspiration was at a peak when I met Bairbre, radical Lesbian and songwriter. We became lovers and throughout the 80s created beautiful and treasured songs and memorable performances. I found Radical Rose Recordings in *Lesbian Connection* and they gave me the guidance to record "More Of It" in 1987. We created our own music label 'Music For Lesbians,' responding to the need we had to clearly state our intent to share our music with Lesbians from our own experience as Lesbians. Our community of south Florida was supportive at concert venues and local gatherings. Something Special\* opened and sponsored several Lesbian Bazaars and events which gave me even more opportunities for performance and improvising music with others. Something Special remains my all time sacred women only space that supports innovation and a comforting environment to explore my creative muse and express myself freely!

In 1992 Hurricane Andrew brought a whirlwind, a vortex of change my way. I put together another recording to reflect these changes. Bairbre was in a new relationship and I was also moving and changing. I decided to expand my work and auditioned for Kay Gardner's oratorio, "Ouroboros" in 1994. I was chosen to sing the part of the menopausal woman, when the work was premiered at the National Women's Music Festival. I had already embraced the value and importance of women's spirituality through Barbara Mor and Z Budapest when I lived in San Diego. And though this would not be a specifically Lesbian piece, I felt the importance of this musical framework for my spirit. The part was a good fit and I was proud to have the opportunity to support Kay's work and return her gift of "Lavender Jane" and "Mooncircles" from the earlier years. That was the first time I performed at a large festival.

My life continued to shift and ever more so after I met Beth through a mutual friend, who wanted us two musicians to meet. Our eyes met as we sang famil-

iar songs like "Tender Lady" and "Spirithealer" at a ceremony for a friend's passing. Beth was getting her PhD and had just been accepted for a teaching position at Utah State University. With music as our guide, we began to see each other, and our attraction grew. We became lovers. She moved to Utah and shortly after, I left my home and precious friends and moved there to be with her. Beth found a small Lesbian community in the small university town, and with the help of a dear friend from Miami, Beth also found Salt Lake City Lesbians.

I missed Miami community a lot and felt a strong need to honor our mutual love and support. From our country home and a grant from Lesbian Land Dykes, I put together another recording called "Day to Day" to acknowledge my south Florida Lesbian community as core and heart of my music making and my creative 'fenergy'.\*

More opportunities to share music came as we met more Lesbians and settled into Utah. There was 'All Women's Eve' and the 'Aura Soma Lava Womyn's Musical and Spirituality Awareness Festival'. I opened for Alix Dobkin at the University of Utah and Idaho State University. Beth and I collaborated on songs we knew from 'women's music' as well as our own original songs and performed in concerts and social gatherings. We found connection to Lesbian community in Missoula, Montana and found wonderful support for our creative sharing. Our latest concert in Salt Lake City was a big success. I have ventured back to the southeast several times to perform and support the 'Southern Womyn's Festival'. I had the opportunity to travel to three women's music festivals this past year. In each festival I see the young continuing a not so old tradition of creating Lesbian culture. The performances still give Lesbians the opportunity to come together in community. That is the key to doing this work. I still feel validation, inspiration and movement. I am more self-loving and empowered, more loving and compassionate, ever more filled with sounds and words of my own creative muse. I am content, yet ever so restless for more, more validation, more acts of radical Lesbian engagement and sharing. I am anxious for my next work and for new songs to evolve. I have devoted my life, my existence to this paradigm shift, to women's spirit rising, to Lesbian spirit, to "Spirited Lesbians."\* I entrust myself to those who come after me, who have been touched by my works and the works of others. We are still a powerful radical force in this patriarchy. Music along with the other arts has provided a safe space for connection, for community. I am still hopeful. I still want more for us. I am grateful for all we have created but I still want "More of It."

\*Something Special, a Lesbian venture in Miami, Florida providing seasonal events and good food since 1987

\*'fenergy', a word from F Louise, Something Special

\* *Spirited Lesbians* a book by Nett Hart, Word Weavers 1989



zana

## faces of myself

what do i like to draw? that's told me a lot about myself, once i paid attention.

i didn't go to art school. i didn't even go to college, though i could have. my parents encouraged me to develop my art talents, but what i liked to do didn't fit in with what the mainstream world seemed to want. by the time i got to college age, i knew i wasn't going to have an art career.

in high school i'd changed my major from art to music after my art teacher gave me a "D" on one of my paintings. it was of a young woman by a pond, under trees—"at the top of the world," i imagined her, in a very private place. the colors were pale pastels and white. my art teacher could have helped me make the figure less stiff, or to achieve more of the airy dreaminess i sought. instead, she said, "you should paint BIG and BOLD." she showed me another girl's painting of a ferocious panther—black against a red-orange background. "try something in turquoise and yellow. they're using those colors a lot at the university of dallas."

for years i had hidden my "doodles"—the wimin's faces i drew in margins during study halls or on the school bus. why couldn't i doodle geometric intricacies like everybody else? why these faces that had no meaning, were nobody, just heads, usually not even bodies. sometimes just eyes, just mouths.

in art classes we were given boxes to draw, and wine bottles set up against draperies, with maybe a fake apple thrown in. we were taken outdoors and instructed to draw not flowers or grasses, but an underpass. once we paired off and did each other's portraits—the only time in four years of school art classes when i was called upon to draw something alive.

i did still-life adequately. unenthusiastically. these were supposed to be necessary—"basics." for what? more lifeless objects, made sophisticated by technique?

many years passed in which i felt i was not really an artist. i developed my skills and identity as a writer, sometimes doing a little art on the side.

i became friends with a couple of wimin who did a lot of pen and ink work. i'd never done much of that, and began to experiment. it was easy to experiment—pens and paper were a lot cheaper than paints and canvas, not to mention easier to transport and store. And where brushes had always felt a bit unwieldy to me, pens gave me more control. i missed working in color, but even without it, my visions came through clearer—what appeared on paper was closer to what i saw in my mind than ever before.

and i remembered the wimin's faces that came out of my ballpoint pen onto lined notebook paper. i hadn't saved any of them—"worthless" things that they were—but i remembered. these faces had told me things about myself that i didn't heed at the time—things about wimin's strength, solitude and sensitivity. once upon a time i had wanted to live out in the country, just me and my best girlfriend. eventually i came to the country with other lesbians—to draw wimin's faces again, and also plants, the shape of the land, things that flow and are alive.

sometimes these are strange flowers, and landscapes from places i've never been, and faces of wimin i have never seen. now i think of them as the spirits of things, the core rather than the surface that is so readily seen. the wimin are spirit parts of myself, and of my friends, and of wimin who pass through my life or may never pass through my life. and they are very real.



zana: Untitled

Cris Williamson

## Introduction to *The Cris Williamson Songbook*

I can remember when all I had was one little song of my own—and *that* had come right out of the blue when I was 16, and I seemingly had nothing whatsoever to do with the writing of it. Then, I suffered endlessly through a great drought of writer's block, and though I continued trying to write, my attempts seemed to be just that—embarrassingly obvious attempts. Because I was an English major, and was reading and studying the greatest of writers, I was almost certain that first song was indeed a fluke and nothing more. So, I decided not to worry at myself about whether or not I could really write. Rather, I would content myself with singing the works of other writers—at least that was the plan. But every now and then, I would find myself with *Something to Say*, and a song would inch its way into my consciousness. These incidental writings and the satisfaction they afforded were enough to give me hope and encourage me to keep on trying to learn to write. Of course, apart from reading itself, one can only learn to write by writing.

And so, I began to keep writing books, full of terrifying blank pages, parking them everywhere in case I should have a thought. I began to keep track of my inner meanderings, and soon the blank pages were filled with a collection of fragments and scraps, which, when put together, did form clues of a sort into the patterns of my own reality, my own quest for my own power. I really began to think of myself as an artist and a writer, and consciously struggled to find my style, the form for my own life comprehensions—an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive, but is rather connected to a deep-seated sense of responsibility to help create a better world in which to live.

As my personal concerns were inevitably pervaded by political realities, it was exactly this sense of responsibility which led me, and hopefully those who continued to attend my work, out of despair and arid self-pity into an abiding affirmation of life. Perhaps as I attempt to make the world more tolerable for myself, I can help make it more tolerable for others as well.

These songs are like drawings on the cave-walls of my mind. It is you who have brought them to light by virtue of your wonderful appreciation. I thank all of you so much for helping me to have faith in the validity of my perceptions and experiences. You have helped me to be an artist. For me that means that I must live life in such a way that my writing comes from it, so that my work and my life are one and the same.

Reprinted with permission from the author from *The Cris Williamson Songbook*. Olivia Records, 1985.

Cris Williamson

*Remember When...*

*Remember when the rooms were filled up with women?  
Remember when we sang the Song of the Soul?  
Remember when we knew that we were changing?  
Changing our Ways, changing our Selves, changing the World*

*Remember when you heard a love song?  
Remember when it was sung from girl-to-girl?  
Remember when the frightened ones came out into the Light?  
Changing our Ways, changing our Selves, changing the World*

*I know you know it's made a difference  
Even though it's hardly mentioned in the world  
The daughters of our daughters still struggle in the tide  
But their mothers are the memories of Remember When...*

*Remember when our world was lost in secrets?  
Remember when our wounds began to heal?  
Remember when our lives became the Changer and Changed?  
Changing our Ways, changing our Selves, changing the World*

©2005 Bird Ankles Music Cris Williamson

Cris Williamson

*He-She Girl*

*Out in Wyoming  
Before I'd gone anywhere  
Main Street was everywhere  
Running the length after school*

*I had a boyfriend  
From sixteen to eighteen  
A teenage routine  
Running the race for cool  
Late at night at the end of Main Street  
We would stop and get something to eat*

Burgers and fries, and our wandering eyes  
Watching the cars...singing the Duke of Earl

We'd see this one car, low and sleek  
Yellow and long and we'd sneak a peek  
At the girl behind the wheel  
She was a He-she girl

He-she girl in her lonely world  
We all would run like she had a gun  
She must have had a lonely life  
No one to talk to through the prairie night

I never saw her with anyone  
And now I know she was a Lesbian  
Now I see she was a sister to me  
She was a Lesbian

Her name was Karen  
Scar in' the boys was her game  
All we knew was her name  
We knew nothing of her life

Now I wonder  
If she ever found the women's world  
I hope she found another girl  
Someone to share her life

Late at night at the end of their day  
They sit at home and let the music play  
They're home on the range singing the Changer and the Changed  
All alone in their sheltered world  
I like to think she is no longer alone  
She's sharing love in a room of their own  
Two prairie queens deep in their dreams  
So much more than a He-she girl

Tee A. Corinne

## Friends When You Need Them

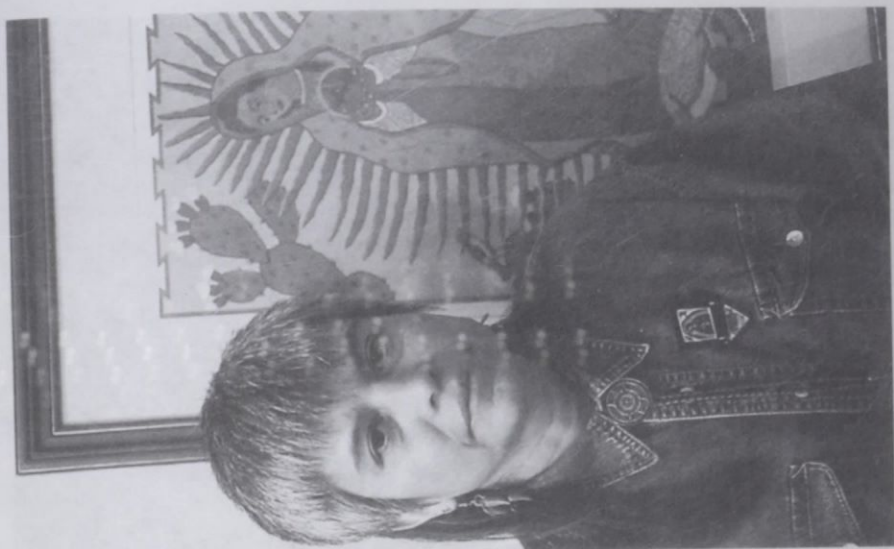
In 1975, I decided to do portraits of lesbians. Photographer Ruth Bernhard, bisexual herself, told me to, "Take pictures of famous people or you will have a basement full of [pictures of] your friends." For three decades, I photographed lesbian writers. They used the images on the back covers of their books and as publicity photographs. These pictures were my way of contributing to lesbian visibility.

Sometime in the 1990s, I made a series of images of lesbian artists, sometimes shown with their work, sometimes not. A book project was discussed, but it fell through. I moderated (and still co-moderate) an e-mail discussion group dealing with lesbian art issues. For long periods it is quiet, then suddenly flares into a flurry of messages.

Now, with my lover dealing with metastasized colon cancer for the past two years, I am aware of focusing my art and my energy close to home, making images of her, of her garden, and of our friends. As I look at the pictures of friends, I think of how *lesbian* some of the images appear, but also of how *lesbian* all of the women are, not culturally "queer" but old-gay butch, new-age femme, and women's-liberation lesbians who have formed a circle of support and love around us.



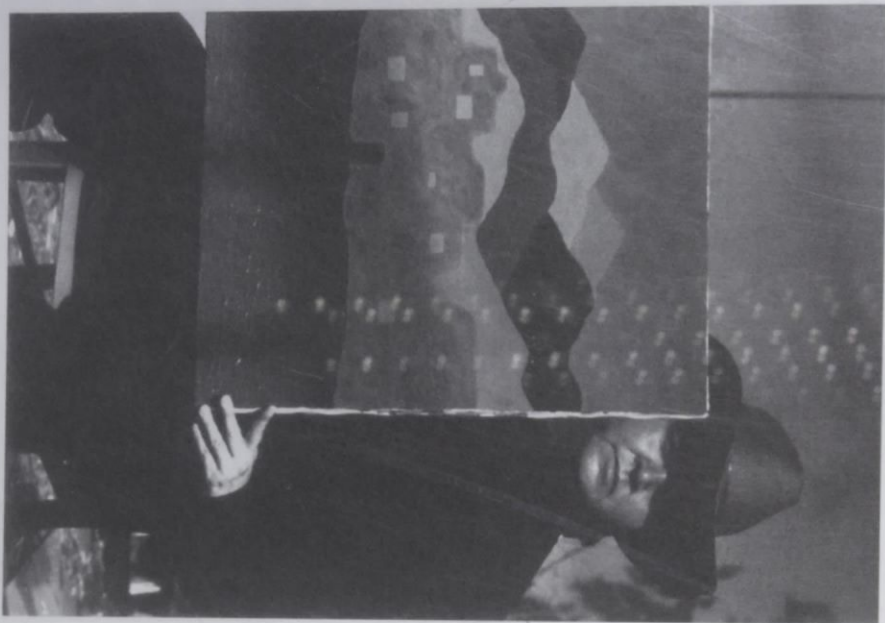
Tee A. Corinne- Composite of friends clockwise from upper left: Tee Corinne, Beverly Brown, Donna Lee Taylor, Hawk Madrone with Molly, Bernie Gardener



Above: Tee A. Corinne- "Irene Perez (b.1950): Muralist and painter"

Below: Tee A. Corinne- "Pell at her store Woman Crafts West in San Francisco, in the 1990's."





Above: Tee A. Corinne- "Barbara Cameron (1954-2002): Painter, photographer and Native American activist"

Below: Tee A. Corinne- "Lenore Chinn (b.1949): Painter and queer arts activist with three of her paintings"





Rose Marcario

## Reflections on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production of Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*

When my friend Sue Hamilton first told me she was directing the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary production of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, I balked. "Why not do some new work?" I said. Sue was adamant about the importance of revisiting the play and introducing it to a new audience. She reminded me that while much has changed in the last twenty years, there is still a long way for us to go. We talked about friends we knew whose parents had disowned them when they came out, and we talked about how our relationships are not validated or protected under the law. The issue of marriage rights seemed particularly poignant since Sue's wife, Christy, had given birth this year to their daughter, Shya. The three of them make such a beautiful family. Sue reminded me of the themes of the play and then smiled, "Come on Rose, who hasn't fallen in love with a straight woman at least once?"

Sue and I both grew up in the infancy stages of lesbian theater, we consider ourselves members of an elite underground who worked in tiny black box theaters doing the work of lesbian and gay playwrights in the early 1980s. Though both of us also worked as actors in traditional theater, we felt a desire to see our lives as lesbians authentically portrayed on the stage. This pushed us to take on roles of writer, director and producer, and find the means to put this work and our lives on stage. Sue and I have talked at length about how powerful the experience was for lesbians to see their stories told in the immediacy and vibrancy of the theater, how women would come to us after shows and express how much our performances had touched them. One evening after my performance as Stacey in Sarah Dreher's, *Alumnae News*, a play based on Dreher's expulsion from Wellesley College because of her "unnatural relationship with another woman," an audience member in her sixties came up to me and began sobbing, "You reminded me of what it was like then, such a struggle, my parents tried to put me in a mental hospital." All of the cast and crew moved toward us and formed a circle of protection, putting their arms around her. I was struck by the paradox of being the recipient of the freedom this woman had fought for and playing out her experiences on stage.

It was one of those perfect southern California evenings when I arrived at the Lily Tomlin Jane Wagner Cultural Arts Center of the Los Angeles Gay

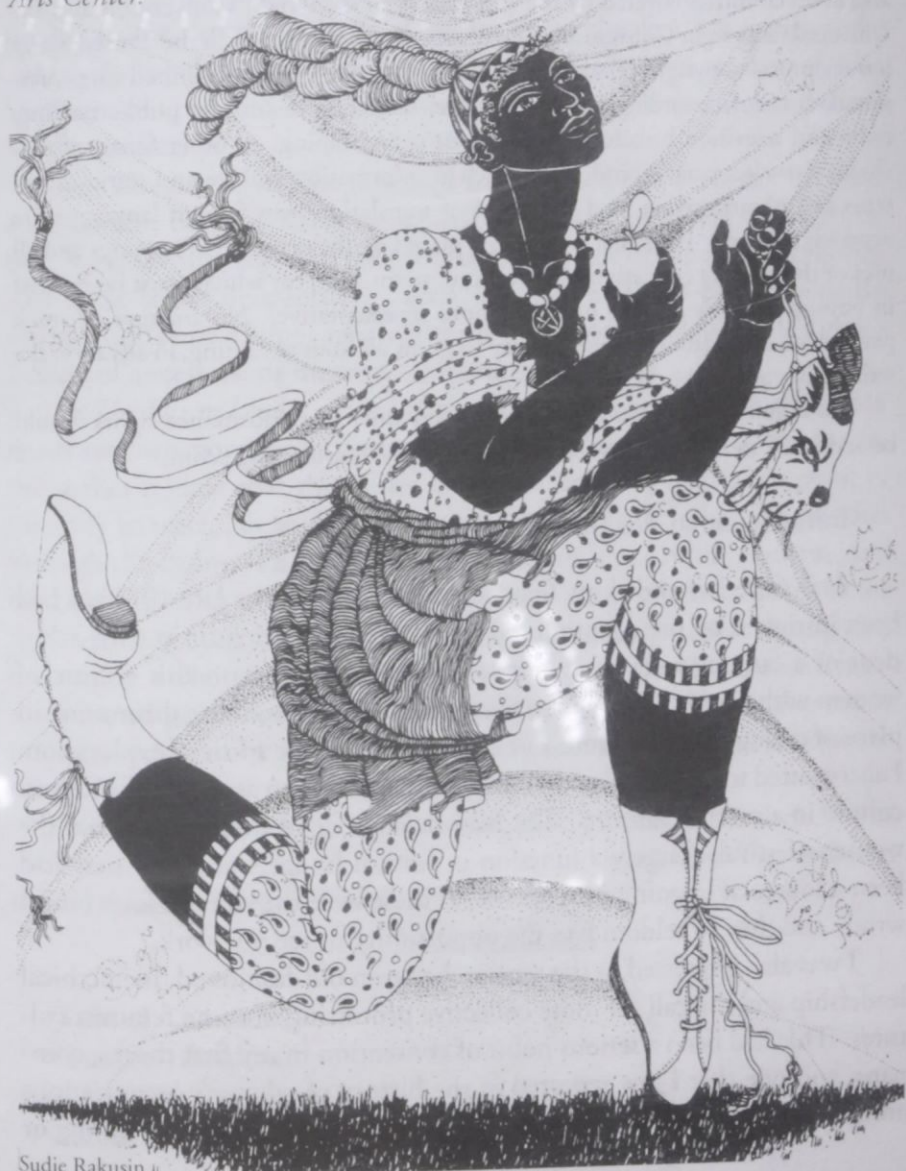
and Lesbian Center. Sue had left me a ticket at the box office. As I walked to the entrance I reflected on the beautifully appointed theater center; it starkly contrasted with where I had worked at Celebration Theater (the first only Gay and Lesbian theater in Los Angeles) over twenty years ago. Celebration Theater was near downtown L.A. and had coffee cans painted matte black for stage lights. I used to fold production programs at the Hollywood apartment of one of our board members, Chuck Rowland, an original member of the Mattachine Society. "Times have changed," I told myself, as I found my seat in the theater. I took in the audience and noted the Palm Pilots and cell phones, devices that would not have been in the theater when *Bluefish* first premiered February of 1980. Sue told me the audience fell into three categories: those who had seen the play in all its incarnations, those who had heard of the play but never seen it, and those who were experiencing it for the first time. All those groups seemed to be represented as I looked around the audience. By the end of the first act I was struck by how much Sue was able to make the play real, poignant and nostalgic without seeming corny or dated. The performers brought the characters to life, and by the last scene where Lil has died of cancer, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The couples who sat in front of me had their arms around each other and softly cried, and I remembered why it is so important for us to have our lives, loves and losses portrayed on the stage with grace, humor and dignity.

Jane Chambers died of a brain tumor in 1983 almost three years to the day of the premiere of *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* in New York. I think she would have been proud to see how her characters and their stories have stood the test of time. They hold a unique place in our hearts and history. She would also be proud of the women who portrayed these characters with such tenderness and attention. Later, over a glass of champagne, I told Sue that I thought she captured and made real all of the important moments. "You can't play the end of the play," she told me, "that's the biggest challenge. You can't give it away, even though people, who know the play, know that Lil dies in the end. You can't take them there until it's time. You have to play each moment, make each moment real."

I thought Sue's words profound. Indeed, we all run into trouble when we try to play the end of the play, when we don't stay present in each vital moment. Our lives are made of the accumulation of such moments that pass us by sometimes like a high speed train. Even our memories don't do us justice. Such moments are contained in Jane Chamber's play and my friend Sue's production: vacationing with old friends, dinners on the beach, arguments, falling in love, running from love, taking risks, sickness, care

giving, death. These are the moments that make up our lives and loves. Part of Jane Chambers' legacy is to give us the experience of live theatre, to see these moments unfold with humor and tenderness, and to remember we all have a last summer to our lives.

*For information regarding the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary production of Last Summer at Bluefish Cove contact: Sue Hamilton, Producing Artistic Director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center – Lily Tomlin Jane Wagner Cultural Arts Center.*



Sudie Rakusin II

Carolyn Gage

## THE DRUM LESSON A One-Act Play for Drummers

Caution: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *The Drum Lesson* is subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights including, but not limited to, professional, amateur, recording, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, video or sound taping, all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as information storage and retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are expressly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed on the question of readings and all uses of this play by educational institutions, permission for which must be secured in writing from the author or the author's representative. No amateur or stock performance or reading of the play may be given without obtaining, in advance, the written permission of the Author.

All inquiries concerning professional and amateur performance rights should be addressed to the Author via her website at [www.carolyngage.com](http://www.carolyngage.com).

### Introduction to *The Drum Lesson*

Ever since I attended my first women's festival in the late 1980's, I had been intrigued by the drumming circles. Later, my friendship with a student of a famous woman drummer brought me closer to this culture of women with drums. It began to occur to me that I could use drumming in place of dialogue, and I wrote *The Drum Lesson* in the spirit of exploration. I also wanted to create a play that would incorporate an aspect of the festival culture in a piece of theatre. The historic absence of live theatre from the women's festivals (largely a function of festival budgets and logistics) had been a source of ongoing pain for me, as these were the women for whom I wrote, and they so seldom had the opportunity to see my work.

I was also interested in the tension between old-fashioned, hierarchical leadership and the call for more collective processing in some feminist cultures. This had been a serious point of contention in my first theatre company, and one that I saw repeated in the history of women's organizations around the country. The gifted and visionary artist is not always willing or

able to "open her process" without losing her single-minded focus on her own muse, which is not only the source of her authority, but also the center from which she imparts her gifts. In my experience, the powerful woman's resistance to collective process may derive from her sense of the sacred, not necessarily from an ego-driven obsession for control.

On the other hand, for women attempting to integrate from the trauma and fragmentation enforced by patriarchal lies and domination, authority figures can become triggers for hyper-vigilant or paranoid behaviors. The lesbian artist who works in communities of women, especially women attracted to the drum as a form of healing or spirituality, can expect to be confronted by the resistance of some survivors. How can we women who are attempting to lead in our communities be responsive without abdicating our authority?

As a director of lesbian theatre, I have learned that there can be a creative tension between these demands. One potential model for organization is a circle that contains the hierarchical triangle of top-down authority. The circle is not necessarily a collective of the women who are being directed. It may be a larger spiritual entity that holds the issues of the play – a circle of ancestors, or mentors, or goddess spirits.

In *The Drum Lesson*, when the teacher is confronted with her students' needs for incorporation of time for personal processing during the lesson, she makes it clear that this is not a skill of hers. For her, it is a point of integrity to teach her students in a style that is organic to her. She teaches through the drum. This response does not satisfy one of the students, and the class begins to split up. This break-up, in turn, triggers another of the students who reacts with psychic violence, acting out her chaos through her drumming. The teacher persistently employs a call-and-response drumming technique in order to bring her back to the circle. Her daring rescue is a turning point for the previously unresponsive student and also for the rest of the class.

The play ends with the teacher's injunction to "Stay in the circle." The circle can be greater than the sum of its parts, and it can heal. The circle can be the ultimate teacher.

### The Drum Lesson

#### Cast of Characters

Yvonne: Student.

Christine: Student.

Nikki: Student.

Naomi: Student.

Aisha: Teacher of the drum class.

Scene: A studio where the drumming lesson is taking place.

Time: The present.

SETTING: *A room with a semi-circle of five chairs. There is a beautiful drum in front of the downstage right chair. This is the teacher's chair.*

AT RISE: *YVONNE enters carrying a drum. She is a nurse, and she has come to the drum in order to escape her role as a professional caregiver. She is still wearing her nurse's uniform, having come from work. She sets up her drum in front of the chair to the left of the teacher's and begins a warm-up.*

*CHRISTINE enters carrying a drum. She is a timid woman who is just beginning to hear her own voice. She sets up her drum one chair over from YVONNE. After watching YVONNE for a moment, she begins to copy her warm-up.*

*NAOMI enters, carrying a drum. She is a troubled woman on the verge of a breakdown. She sets up her drum in the downstage left chair opposite YVONNE and begins an exuberant improvisation with flamboyant arm movements. YVONNE attempts to conceal her annoyance.*

*Finally, NIKKI enters, carrying a drum. She has a need to fix people. She crosses to the chair in the middle and sets her drum down in front of it. She sits, intentionally not taking the drum out of its case. YVONNE stops drumming to look at her. CHRISTINE, who has been copying YVONNE, stops also. NIKKI ignores YVONNE's non-verbal challenge. After a moment, YVONNE resumes drumming. CHRISTINE, disturbed by NIKKI's gesture of defiance, does not resume her drumming.*

*An offstage door closes. All of the women look up. YVONNE and NAOMI stop drumming, anticipating the entrance of their teacher. AISHA enters. Moving with immense dignity and reserve, she seats herself at her drum. She is a lesbian, a complicated and deeply private woman. She has noticed NIKKI's failure to uncover her drum, and she chooses to ignore the gesture. She performs a brief, but impressive drum solo for the benefit of her students. This leads into a simple warm-up exercise. After a moment of respectful silence, the students join in — except for NIKKI who has still not taken her drum out.*

*After the warm-up, AISHA stops drumming, and her students stop. She looks at YVONNE and gives her a rhythm. YVONNE pauses briefly to look at NIKKI, surprised that AISHA would begin the class without making NIKKI unpack her drum, but AISHA continues to look at her. YVONNE repeats the rhythm. AISHA gives it again. YVONNE repeats it. AISHA gives it again. YVONNE, with increased concentration, repeats it. To the audience, it should sound as if she is replicating the teacher's pattern exactly.*

AISHA: (To YVONNE) Listen. (She repeats the rhythm. YVONNE copies her. AISHA gives it again, and again YVONNE copies it exactly. YVONNE looks at her.)

YVONNE: I can't tell the difference.

AISHA: Listen. (She repeats it. YVONNE copies it. AISHA says nothing and, skipping over NIKKI, turns to CHRISTINE. She gives her a rhythm that is simpler than the one she gave to YVONNE. CHRISTINE, nervous, has trouble repeating it. AISHA gives it to her again. CHRISTINE makes another mistake.)

CHRISTINE: I'm sorry. (AISHA gives it again. CHRISTINE freezes.) I'm sorry. Can you give it to me again? (AISHA repeats it. Again CHRISTINE makes a mistake. AISHA repeats it and CHRISTINE, with visible relief, finally gets it. Still ignoring NIKKI, AISHA turns to NAOMI and gives her a simple rhythm. NAOMI responds with a complete improvisation. YVONNE makes a sound to register her irritation. AISHA shoots her a look, and then patiently repeats the rhythm to NAOMI who, this time, drums it back accurately. At a signal from AISHA, the women begin drumming together, each one drumming her assigned pattern. CHRISTINE struggles to remember hers. After a few repetitions, she begins to copy YVONNE. AISHA stops the drumming. She looks at CHRISTINE and repeats the pattern that she gave her earlier. CHRISTINE nods and repeats it back.)

AISHA: Again. (She signals her students to recommence the drumming. Again, CHRISTINE loses her pattern and begins to copy YVONNE. AISHA stops them again.)

CHRISTINE: I'm sorry. I can get it when you play it, but I can't remember it when everyone is playing. I'm sorry. I just can't hear my own rhythm if everyone else is playing something different.

AISHA: It takes practice.

CHRISTINE: But I feel like I'm wasting everyone's time.

AISHA: We're all learning. *(She resumes. CHRISTINE breaks the rhythm.)*

CHRISTINE: Maybe if I could move out of the circle, I could hear myself better. *(AISHA ignores her and begins to drum again. NAOMI and YVONNE join in with their rhythms. CHRISTINE, unsure what to do, pushes her chair quietly back from the circle and watches the others. Suddenly NIKKI stands up. AISHA ignores her. The three women continue to drum. NAOMI begins to improvise. AISHA stops. She gives NAOMI her rhythm again. NAOMI repeats it. AISHA begins the drumming again.)*

NIKKI: Stop it! Stop it! *(AISHA stops drumming and looks at her. The others stop. NIKKI speaks to AISHA.)* This is crazy! Are we all just going to sit here and pretend to ignore what's going on here.

YVONNE: And what is going on here?

NIKKI: Well, for one thing, look at Christine . . . She's not even part of the circle. And listen to Naomi. I'm not sure she was ever a part of it . . .

NAOMI: *(Surprised)* Yes, I am!

NIKKI: *(On a roll).* . . and look at me! I haven't even unpacked my drum — or didn't you notice?

YVONNE: *(Disgusted)* We noticed.

AISHA: *(Quietly)* What's your point, Nikki?

NIKKI: My point? My point is that this is supposed to be a drumming class, but you don't seem to care when half your students aren't with you!

YVONNE: If women want to pay their money to come here and not drum, that's their business —

AISHA: Yvonne. *(YVONNE stops talking.)* Nikki — I understand that you're unhappy with the way I teach . . .

NIKKI: It's not —



YVONNE: (*Cutting her off*) Let her talk!

AISHA: Not every teacher is right for every student. I came to the drum because it allowed me to express myself in this culture in ways I never found through language. There are other teachers who are more comfortable with language. That is not my strength. But I do know the drum. I know how to listen to it and I know how to speak through it. If my teaching isn't working for you, I'm sorry, but I can't change the way I am or the way I teach. (*There is a moment of respectful silence as the students acknowledge the tremendous effort behind this unusual act of self-disclosure.*)

NIKKI: I don't want another teacher. I want to study with you — here, in this class. But you tell us to bring our whole selves to the drum, to the circle. I can't do that when there are all these problems in the class that nobody's addressing. It means I have to pretend not to see them either, and that means splitting off parts of myself to be here. How can I be present when so much of me has to be absent?

YVONNE: (*Totally exasperated*) I work on a psyche ward all day — I work with people who have real problems. And I come here to drum. I don't come here to "process." And it's not fair to me, or to Naomi, or to Christine, when you disrupt the class and try to turn it into a therapy session.

AISHA: Nikki, I need you to take out your drum and join the class. (*NIKKI doesn't move.*) If you can't do that, then I need to ask you to leave. (*NIKKI doesn't move.*)

YVONNE: (*To NIKKI*) Well, if you don't go, I will . . . (*She rises, but NIKKI grabs her drum and starts to exit. Suddenly CHRISTINE stands.*)

CHRISTINE: Wait, Nikki! (*NIKKI turns around.*) I'll go with you.

YVONNE: You can't do that! Aisha needs a minimum of three students to teach the class!

(*CHRISTINE hesitates. Suddenly NAOMI breaks into drumming.*)

YVONNE: (*To NAOMI*) Stop it! That's so disrespectful! (*NAOMI drums louder. YVONNE shouts.*) Stop it!

CHRISTINE: *(To YVONNE)* Don't yell at her! *(NAOMI has lost all control. Her drumming has become wild and incoherent. The students realize that she is experiencing some kind of serious break with reality. CHRISTINE tries to touch her, but this only causes her to escalate. CHRISTINE backs off. In an attempt to reach NAOMI, AISHA begins to drum. At first NAOMI ignores her, attempting to shut out her teacher, but gradually AISHA is able to insinuate herself into NAOMI's drumming and establish a tentative dialogue with her runaway student. The dialogue becomes stronger and more coherent as NAOMI begins to respond to AISHA's drumming. Eventually, AISHA succeeds in drumming NAOMI down off her psychotic ledge. Exhausted, NAOMI collapses in sobs over her drum. CHRISTINE touches her gently, and NAOMI allows herself to be held. Nobody speaks for a moment.)*

NIKKI: Naomi, I'm sorry . . . *(To AISHA)* I'm sorry . . . *(YVONNE begins a heartbeat rhythm. NAOMI picks it up. NIKKI unpacks her drum and offers her participation in the heartbeat to her teacher. CHRISTINE joins in. AISHA receives their tribute in silence. After a moment, she holds up her hands to command silence.)*

AISHA: It is the circle that heals us. In the circle, our individual defects become our collective strengths. Nikki needs people to be something more than we are, and Yvonne doesn't need us at all. Christine can't hear her own voice, but that's the only one Naomi can hear. But the circle holds us all. *(She turns to YVONNE and gives her a rhythm, as at the beginning of the class. She turns to NIKKI and gives her a rhythm. She turns to CHRISTINE and gives her a rhythm. CHRISTINE has trouble repeating it.)*

AISHA: *(To CHRISTINE)* Stay in the circle. *(CHRISTINE nods. AISHA gives NAOMI a rhythm. NAOMI repeats it exactly. AISHA looks at her for a long moment and, for the first time, smiles. The women begin to drum.)*

THE END

Sandy Tate

## Interview with Mary Watkins September 4, 2004

SANDY: Where did you grow up?

MARY: I was born in Denver and grew up in Pueblo, Colorado.

SANDY: Did you have music in your household as a child?

MARY: Yes, we had a piano, but I don't remember playing it that much. I recall that sometimes they would have choir practice at our house instead



Photo Credit: Roxanna N. Fiumma

Mary Watkins and Sandy Tate at the piano after Mary's concert for Sandy's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday

of at the church, and my mother was sort of the relief pianist and this was one of those periods where they didn't have a regular pianist, so she would fill in and sometimes I would hear her practicing a little bit.

SANDY: Did you take lessons as a child?

MARY: Yes. When I was three years and nine months my mother carted me off to the local music teacher. I have an older cousin who had started playing piano when she was two. She just kind of crept up to the piano, this little kid, and started picking things out, and I don't think it ever occurred to my mother that there was anything unusual about this. I remember very well her talking about this upcoming music lesson, sort of priming me how to behave at this music lesson etc. I kept thinking, "What is this gonna be

like?" I'll never forget that day. I was three years and nine months. It was September and my birthday was in December. I don't remember necessarily liking music lessons all that much, however I did always respond deeply to music. I liked music, and what I liked about playing the piano as a little kid was that I could go pick out tunes I wanted to play. I was always able to do that. But because playing by ear was not allowed, I was only supposed to play from sheet music, etc. So playing piano didn't mean a whole lot to me except when I could pick out what I wanted to play. That had to be when there was no one in the room to get after me about doing this because the whole point was, "You should learn to read music! We are trying to give you the advantage of becoming a literate musician, and none of this playing by ear stuff." I did both, but was careful not to do it when the adults were around.

SANDY: Did you play any instruments in the band in school?

MARY: Yes, I played the violin in grade school and some in junior high, and then I switched over to the cornet because my brother was supposed to be playing the cornet. Because he wasn't into it, I took it over and played it in junior high. Then in the ninth grade I switched over to tuba and played it in the school band. The tubas were very light, so I could march with it. They looked huge and heavy but they weren't. I played the violin in high school orchestra for awhile, and later they needed a tuba so I switched over to that; I never was really a good violinist. I learned very fast and my teacher thought I had a lot of natural ability which I did, but I didn't have the patience because as you know, a violin sounds pretty awful when one is first learning to play. I was used to a piano and when I wanted to hear a G, I wanted to hear a G, not almost a G.

SANDY: Did you always want to be a musician?

MARY: That's a funny question. No, I don't think so. I came to that a little later but I was always a musician. Music was very natural to me. I never had to work at it. I had to practice to develop technique, but I never had any struggle with music. It was like a language to me so I'm not sure I ever imagined not doing it. At one time I wanted to be a commercial artist. I was very good at drawing cartoons and things like that. My father used to bring home lots of scratch paper for me from work so I could make my own comic books and I loved doing that. I could spend forever doing that. I thought I'd like to be an artist, but the word was that artists can't make a living. Neither could musicians but I didn't hear too much about that. However, I was encouraged to do something more practical, i.e., "teach or learn typing" as a backup.

SANDY: What school did you attend to develop your abilities on the piano?

MARY: I had a private teacher, and then when I was in college, of course, I had a college professor as my piano teacher. I had to do graduation recitals and dreaded juries. A jury was when you'd have to perform just for the faculty and those could be nightmares if you hadn't spent enough time practicing. I switched my major from music education to straight education, and then I dropped out because I got married for a short time and moved to Washington D.C. Then I decided to go back to school and majored in music composition. I took as little piano as possible. I really didn't want to do Brahms or Chopin recitals. I just wasn't into that. I loved the music but I knew that I did not want to spend 4 to 5 hours a day practicing. I wanted to do other things.

SANDY: Where did you go to school?

MARY: I started out at Colorado State College, and I graduated from Howard University.

SANDY: Were there any particular jazz musicians that influenced your playing?

MARY: I remember when I was in high school I heard these guys play jazz. At that time I had never heard anyone actually play jazz live, though I heard a little bit of it on the radio. I thought it was fascinating music. On one occasion these guys asked me if I would play piano with them in school assembly. I'd played boogie woogie but I had never played jazz in the true sense, so this was my first time. I did pretty well because I could easily pick up styles. Playing with those guys was the beginning of playing jazz for me. I would listen to people at that time like Oscar Peterson, Andre Previn, Bill Evans and Billy Taylor, people like that. I didn't really study them. I listened to what they did and I picked and chose what I wanted to incorporate into my own playing.

SANDY: I haven't heard your latest CD, but I have "Song for My Mother," and I was listening to it again this morning. Your playing is almost like meditation for me. It's not like a lot of jazz I've heard. You have a style that is so calming and tranquil, and I love it. How did you come to that? Is that just a part of who you are?

MARY: I really think so and I'm beginning to accept that very gratefully. For a long time I thought I had to play the ways these other guys played and I was not ever comfortable with it. There is a real aggressive style of playing which is not the way I best express myself. I'm more meditational.

SANDY: How has racism in the U.S. affected your music and your access to music?

MARY: I don't know that racism itself has had any affect on my music.

As far as race is concerned, I know that the roots, the emotion of my music is coming from the soul of an African American woman—an African American to whom music is as functional to my being in life as it is an art form; a Black American with strong European influence, musically and culturally; and therefore as American as apple pie.

SANDY: If money were no object would you have a club to play at or how would you do things differently?

MARY: If money were no object I don't know if I'd play in clubs at all. I would do concerts. I absolutely would do more composing in the area of opera, chamber music and I would continue to write and play with other jazz musicians.

SANDY: I understand you're writing an opera called 'Queen Clara, Angel of the Battlefield', a tribute to the Civil War nurse Clara Barton.

MARY: There was a play about Clara Barton in Minnesota. When I met the playwright he and I made a commitment to write the opera and I just love doing that. I love the drama because you can take the music over the top and just go with it and I didn't know that I had a talent for that. I remember the first time I was approached to doing an opera that I was just frozen because I didn't think I could do it. I tried it and from that point on there was no struggle. I loved it.

SANDY: What part of the opera are you doing?

MARY: I'm doing the music. The playwright is doing the words.

SANDY: When do you think it might be completed?

MARY: We've done several works in progress for it, three in San Francisco and three in Oakland. It's a big deal to try to pull it off because it demands a chorus and several lead singers, and we have not had the money backing us up. I'm close to being finished with the opera. I haven't been able to work on it consistently because of lack of money supporting it, but we've got a lot written in spurts. Obviously, we're going to have to find someone to take it on.

SANDY: In reading about Clara Barton, it sounds to me like she might have been a Lesbian. Do you have any thoughts about that?

MARY: I know she believed in free love, was a Unitarian, and a very liberal woman, she never married, but she did have lovers. One of them was her assistant. She was about 80 and he was about 45. She definitely was not part of the conservative community. I don't know if she had women lovers. She was friendly with many of the feminist leaders of the time, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but I have not read anything about her being Lesbian.

SANDY: You can't walk into a lounge anymore and hear a three-piece combo as you could in the past. What happened to jazz?

MARY: Nothing happened to jazz but it's all about money, and instant gratification. In some ways it's making a comeback but I think money has been a lot of the problem. People who listen to jazz are usually older and more intellectual. If people listen to jazz and it's not something they've heard before and can immediately identify with, then they don't bother to come back.

SANDY: So you think it's due to the quick and frenzied kind of younger generation we have now. Also, I hear the way some jazz has evolved into jazz fusion. The old traditional jazz doesn't seem to be what people are listening to.

MARY: Right. Jazz fusion works because it has a much bigger audience and is more accessible.

SANDY: Do you play any other instruments besides piano?

MARY: Not these days because of lack of time. I played the trombone for a little while about ten years ago.

SANDY: Would you mind talking about your recent bout with cancer?

MARY: I was diagnosed very early when I went for a usual mammogram and they discovered some irregularities in the tissue and they didn't know whether it was malignant. I had a needle biopsy first that didn't really yield enough information. They suggested a surgical biopsy which I had and they found that some of the tissue inside the duct was malignant, but it was not invasive. It didn't go outside of the duct so that was really fortunate. So I had a lumpectomy to get rid of the bad tissue and I did six weeks of radiation. I never went through any debilitating fear or depression or anything like that. I knew that it could be a lot worse and I felt I was making the right decisions by having them go in. I wanted them to get out whatever wasn't supposed to be in there, so I went along with them. I think I was under a lot of stress but it was subtle. I didn't realize until everything including the radiation was over that I'd been pretty stressed about it. I had to go to radiation every day except on weekends. I didn't experience any pain and went along in a normal way knowing that I was experiencing this thing that could be life-threatening, but it was going well because I had lots of support from the people I was living with. I didn't talk about it a lot. The word was not really out there while I was going through it, and I had a reason for that. I felt that you can create a lot of your own illness by focusing on it and imagining and worrying, and I thought the less I said about it the better because I felt that I was gonna be fine. I never accepted not being o.k. I talked about it to a couple of people but I kept it pretty quiet.

SANDY: When did you form the Mary Watkins Trio?

MARY: I've had several different groups but the trio was actually a quartet of all women and we would do gigs in the Oakland Bay area and often it was just trio and was called Mary Watkins Trio.

SANDY: I love the fact that your trio is all women. What led to your teaming up with them?

MARY: I met Joyce Kouffman in Boston many years ago. I think that when I first became aware of her was in 1980. I was supposed to do a concert with the New England Women's Philharmonic, which didn't happen because there was a problem with funding that didn't come through for the orchestra. So, the concert didn't happen. I believe Joyce said that she met me there. I remember her producing a workshop that I did and that's when I first became aware of her. Cindy Browne has been playing the bass around the Bay area, and I've seen her several times and thought she was excellent. I called Joyce and asked her if she would be interested in playing with me, and she was, so we did some gigs together. Joyce had come to me for some coaching in composition, and I had an ongoing relationship with her off and on. Some years after she started these sessions with me she began writing some really nice tunes. We played them in concert after which she decided she'd like to record them. That's how I happened to team up with her and Cindy Browne on the first CD which was *Song for my Mother*. The most recent CD, *Who Has Not Been Touched*, was Joyce's idea. Her partner went through the cancer experience and it had a profound affect on Joyce. She was one of the very few people I talked to during my cancer experience, as I knew she had a certain sensitivity to what I might be going through. She had already initiated the project of composing music based on the experience of being close to someone suffering with cancer. Her partner has recovered but both she and Joyce are committed to sharing their knowledge and support for the fight against cancer. We used a different bass player because Cindy was not available, and this was not a trio.

SANDY: What led to dedicating *Song for my Mother* to Thelma R. Kouffman who was a music activist and enriched so many listeners?

MARY: Thelma was Joyce's mother and she was a promoter and possibly a producer of concerts in Boston for many years of classical music. She developed Alzheimer's and passed away, and this was Joyce's tribute to her.

SANDY: How are you doing now?

MARY: I'm doing fine. This is supposed to be a life-changing experience and I was wondering when it would kick in, and I felt like I could definitely use some changes. It was subtle, but eventually it's about getting



your life together and focusing in about 'what do I want in a way that I hadn't before'.

SANDY: Your good positive attitude was, I'm sure a big help. Thank you.

Mary's web page can be viewed at: [www.marywatkins.net](http://www.marywatkins.net)



Photo Credit: Karen Cooper

Mary Watkins

Marjorie Norris

## Anima, Spirit

I want to say what the world of wide-opened wildness brings: the slant of light that Emily Dickenson portrayed, the emptiness of a bag as it floats along the highway, the cravenness of joy, the dance, the trance of all our lives. Since a little girl, I played in the mud where the earth sang to me, and angels danced, I dreamed one day of being a potter but it was not to be: flat pancakes do not a sculpture make, but the sounds of songs came as I patted the cakes, and the words of poems played in my head even when I was too young to write. I come from an Irish-American family, where words were as important as beer and potatoes and tea, where conversations poured out faster than feeling or passion could, the passion sometimes repressed in favor of the beer or the waxing profound about the dead and the living. My grandmother read me the rhythms of Mother Goose, and it was on Mother Goose that I cut my first poetic teeth, where I longed then also to paint our neighborhood, our experiences. The women were important to me in this embodiment, my grandmother, chosen hearth mother, stirrer of the pot, spinner of dreams and collage. And my beloved Cora, my ancient babysitter, who listened to my stories with her parrot: so many women have taught me their artistry: Eileen Myles, Mary Oliver, Margaret Smith, who now lives in Detroit, where I first saw lesbian actors portraying their lives in Hag Theater here in Buffalo, Gloria Fuertes in her poems, Adrienne Rich. I am blessed by the voices of women everywhere, and how often I have danced to their tunes till four in the morning: Alix Dobkin, Chris Williamson, Tret Fure, k.d. lang, spun out, entranced, made joyful in their creative hands. And, eventually, it was the music and the dance that set me free: dancing with Sue Keleher in the hours of dawn at the bar, drinking only water, spun out of the wide web, the hallucinogen of music, spinning until we were in a trance, wheeling like Sufis on some mystic shore, encouraging other women to join us, to collaborate in the joy of the world, the inclusion that eluded us in our day lives at work, sweating in rhythm to the delight of voices that belonged to us, reeling with the adventure that was, and continues to be, every day, our becoming.

Ann Hackler

## The Institute for the Musical Arts

*What if* artists like Tracy Chapman were the norm, rather than the exception in mainstream music? What if all-female bands were as common as all-male bands or if fifty percent of all professional symphony orchestras were composed of women? What if we could all name three Native-, Latin- & Asian- American musicians without thinking twice? What if it was ordinary to see women running the sound at a concert, or if female producers & engineers weren't anomalies? What if there were more women at the top of record companies? Each day the Institute for the Musical Arts brings these dreams a bit closer to reality.

Imagine a world in which the major decisions affecting the community are made in the kitchen, rather than in some isolated boardroom; a world where what is central at the workplace is the coming together to break bread, rather than simply to make it. Imagine this because it's what is happening in our little corner of the world as we grow this place rooted in women's relationships. Imagine this because as we continue to work to bring equality, balance and harmony to the world, we are moving toward a place where everyone that comes to The Table is fed.

IMA is a non-profit teaching, performing and recording facility dedicated to supporting women in music and its related businesses.

### Programs

#### Performances:

IMA offers a series of concerts by established female artists as well as showcasing new artists who have recorded or studied at IMA. Designed to break down barriers between artist and audience, the concerts take place in the intimate setting of IMA's "Big Room" and include a question and answer period. The music presented is as diverse as the artists themselves. In addition to the small concert setting, IMA produces a large outdoor festival, Divafest, each fall featuring the talent associated with IMA.

#### Workshops:

Weekend workshops, facilitated by performing artists and music business professionals, are offered throughout the year. Topics include: vocal &

instrumental instruction; album production, recording & sound reinforcement techniques; lyric & music composition; booking, promotion & entertainment law. Unless specified, workshops are tailored to benefit students of all skill levels and, like all IMA events, are open to everyone.

#### Summer Sessions:

During the summer IMA offers a series of classes which provide an excellent opportunity for skills development, networking, and jamming. Sessions have included: Composition and Songwriting, Studio Recording and Album Production as well as Performance Skill Development and three two week long Rock 'n' Roll Girls' Camp sessions.

#### Resources:

IMA serves as a clearinghouse and networking center for resources and services available to women in music. If we can't directly provide you with the information you seek, we'll refer you to someone who can.

#### Recording Studio:

IMA's studio offers 32 tracks of digital and 16 tracks of analog capability, state of the art outboard gear and mics as well as an array of amps and instruments including a Kawai parlor grand piano and Yamaha studio drumset. Because a major stumbling block for many female musicians is access to studio equipment and knowledge of the recording process, the studio is utilized both as a teaching facility for aspiring engineers and new recording artists and as a professional-quality recording studio. The studio's pastoral setting, complete with sheep and lovely flower-filled courtyard, is ideal for letting the creative juices flow. The warmth of the recording chamber is echoed by the friendly laid-back atmosphere. The Muses don't just visit IMA, they live here year 'round. Please contact us for more information on studio fees, availability and equipment.

IMAEast: po box 867, goshen, ma 01032

(413) 268-3074

imaeast@aol.com

<www.ima.org>

Sudie Rakusin

## Art in Print

When I came out and began to submit my drawings and paintings to publications for the first time I experienced a warm reception to my art. I submitted to *Sinister Wisdom*, *Big Mama Rag*, *Telewoman*, *The Inciter*, *Lesbian Connection*, *Common Lives*, and Syracuse Cultural Workers to name a few. The lesbian community was beginning to learn how to use artists' work ethically—to get permission before reproducing it, crediting the artist, paying with copies of the issue, etc. Although there were times someone would tell me they had seen a drawing of mine in a magazine I had never heard of, ultimately we all learned a great deal about mutual respect in the world of publishing. Despite glitches I was included and received and supported. I work in solitude, in a literal vacuum, so when I submit my work and it is positively received I am encouraged. Womyn still tell me they appreciate seeing themselves in my drawings and paintings.

What I have known since birth is that I am a visual artist. Even if the praise had never come I would do this work. There really is no equivocation. When I asked a psychic years ago why my hands always looked older than the rest of me, lined and wrinkled, she told me that I was a Renaissance limner like Albrecht Durer. I appreciated my hands' work so much I brought them with me. I believe being a lesbian with the gift of my art in this century is the perfect mix. I am grateful the ideas continue to flow through me, that I have the capability, drive, and passion to manifest them and that womyn continue to receive my art into their hearts in the manner it has always been offered.



Sudie Rakusin: "Awaiting My Muse" ©1997

Ferron

## “Courting the Muse”

### Sentimental Education

The process of writing can catch us like wind in a sail. It can surprise us, like the funny little tune we find ourselves whistling after encountering a certain smell. Sometimes the same old road, or the new spring blossoms, or a stranger's head from behind can make us remember things we'd much rather forget. But, writer or not, we can't forget some things. We seem to be sponges for memories.

Memories can be physical or poetic, in time or out of time, but how we hold them to our selves reflects our individual humanity. Many years ago I read an article suggesting a time when computers would rule the world, and I said to a friend that to make a computer act like a human, they'd have to program sentimentality into it. I guess what I'm saying is: If you like the songs on *Driver*- if you don't mind going down the winding, two-lane road that runs through the middle of that recording - then you are probably comfortably challenged by sentimentality. That “two-lane road” is the question of not only learning what makes us human, but also learning to cherish what makes us human.

My early work took people and put them in exacting, yet unfulfilling human situations and watched what they did with just a few inadequate tools. In my own life, I suppose I have felt like an experiment waiting to turn, but by what ingredients? But now, for a moment, and after 25 years of writing, a kind of quiet acceptance of roads taken or not taken has graced this present body of work. I love the woman/mother in “Sunshine.” I wept openly for weeks trying to write out her perspective. It was not readily my full perspective, but I learned something following hers all the way through. Are you surprised to hear me say that I was listening to someone talk? Check out the conversations that go on in your head while you are, for instance, driving. Notice the times that you think you don't know something and then it's as though it's whispered into your ear. As a songwriter, I bank on that internal conversation and feel admittedly lonely when it leaves me from time to time. And speaking of “time,” sentimentality requires a sense of time - time passing, time spent, time coming, time wasted and time suspended. Time places us on specific coordinate points. Time allows us to decide if something has happened or is still possible or was worthwhile. In

the song "Sunshine," the most heartbreaking moment for me is realizing the mother is slipping in and out of linear time. I am heartbroken for her, but more so for her daughter, who's destined to lose something in a process where she's not the chooser. Choice is a powerful tool and the mother's tools, powerful and refined, are definitely future-focused. "Cactus," on the other hand, approaches time by starting in one place and running somewhat past focused, going simply from the present to various pasts, not slipping and sliding. These two songs are both weary and loving, but "Cactus," while ultimately becoming refined, suggests a future by acknowledging and holding sacred a clumsy past, bringing to terms all the possibilities born out of rough tools - the comings and the goings of a hungry heart, the hoping and the letting go that only a dreamer can manage, the aspirations of the soul set against the backdrop of the cheap dreams and sometimes cheaper promises. I don't think I learned how to love until I was so dry to the bone that I had to pull my water from within, and so, yes, I am the cactus. And no one was more surprised than I.

If we do not value pain as the primary growth process, can pain ease its pull on us? Does pain reflect the major rite of passage toward reflective experience? To know our pain is to know one corner of our limits, but sometimes, when I'm hanging with funny friends, I know humor to be another important limit and a most valuable corner. And do not forget courage. Or conviction. Understanding these things to be what gods and goddesses are made of, why not imitate the best? So, while I am not hired to write a specific song for a specific person, I do write to my best and worst selves. By default, I live myself into a knot and then must straighten it out. The song "Cactus" came from a challenge, between Roy Forbes, Don Freed, Connie Caldor and me, to write a song titled "Chinese Dinner Alone." I believe that Roy, Don and Connie had written their song. Mine was slow in coming. Finally, in a motel in upstate New York, with two days leave from shows, during a great foliage week with weather that kept me both warm and forlorn, on a street of strangers with not a decent cup of coffee to be found, I must have asked my self "What price freedom?" And so began a series of reflections and a way to, in a sense, coordinate myself in time.

I like to explore "the deal." It changes depending on the light. I found myself in a Chinese restaurant drinking really bad coffee and I was alone. Sometimes things just click. I pretended I was writing to some one I had loved who had left to do something else. I let them love me even though they'd left, meaning ... I let all the players be good people. I let the song be an opportunity to own up to some things I'd never heard myself say, hoping

it would change me, help me become the person I longed to be. And, of course, I tried to rise to Paul Simon's challenge of "writing a spiritual tune by writing about the moon," and learned and accepted during that particular verse that, though I had often wanted to leave Earth and head for the moon, when it came to being wistful it seemed I could and would do it anywhere, so why waste the gas!

Even though I am willing to start a song without knowing where it's going, sentimentality needs something to hang on. In the opening lines of "Cactus," I'm hoping that you, the reader/listener will know it's twilight because of the presence of the hoot owl, but I don't need you to place me in twilight so much as let twilight be the light you start to listen with. I want you to end up listening with the brilliant desert light shining down on everything. As in "Sunshine," the direction is toward an honest, brilliant light, but it's not important that you listen with that in mind. Sometimes these things are fine enough just happening for the writer. For me, I was relieved to see the direction the light was heading in both of these songs, and later, after the last song for *Driver* was written and placed, I could see the "holy" light I refer to in the song "Maya" having to do with the desire to grow-to love, to nurture and protect, to cherish. And, of course, like the mother in "Sunshine," to know when to let go. When I was a child I did, indeed, hide in hayfields. Thirty years later, the light that shines down in the last song on *Driver* shines down on both mountains and humans indiscriminately. And I am left with the feeling of having a chance at something I had mostly only dreamed of — pure and honest love that might exist in the light of day.

These are songs about doing until it's done. And then figuring out how to live. So it seems important to talk a daily kind of language: to create a sentence out of a simple task or a basic longing. These songs are the voice of a character who chose the wrong door at least once in almost every situation but still lives to talk about it- and can talk about it in plain English. These songs are also about tenderness in rugged circumstances, and grace being present for no apparent reason or ulterior motive - just the way grace is. Both "Cactus" and "Sunshine" are about love finding its way home with loss, even if the only loss is the loss of pride (one of my favorite losses). The voice behind the words purposefully spills them out steadily as reflectors on the highway letting me know that I had "learned my lessons well."

You don't have to know that orange and blue are opposite on the color wheel, and therefore complementary, to put them next to each other. You just need to know that you like blue and orange together. Complementary opposites can make for a very good song. Bittersweet comes from this. Wistful



comes from this. Wry can come from this. I use it in the verse in "Cactus" where I talk about trying hard to cross the great river, and learning that the trying was the very thing you needed to do to find out that you were where you were going. That verse also suggests a loner fighting a battle, only to finally get to the other side and make camp/village/town/city/culture with every other proud-eyed loner. Look at your own language and see if you have a loner, or a clown, or a sad sack, or a river, a secret, a hill, a light that shows up everywhere. I bet you do, and I bet you live by your belief in those things. Our lives are also symbols of our lives. That is how a sentence like "A thought is as good as a deed" can be true. And I guess I think that an attempt is as good as an event for learning. I guess I think that our lives are backdrops for learning attempts. How's that for bittersweet?

The muse often plays hard to get. She has to. If she doesn't, then we don't think we've made something nice. We feel fraudulent. We feel like we cheated, and in art, we songwriters like to think we have very high standards. But whether it comes easily or if it draws blood, it is very important to realize that while the song won't make or break you, not caring might. Sometimes I think that I don't have a single song left in me, and then I hear the neighbor's radio, or I listen to music real low (loud enough to guarantee that I could never go to sleep but low enough not to hear the words), and then my words start tumbling around. The best part is when I'm interested in all the words that bounce around. But sometimes I make like I'm not. Must be my way of playing hard to get back!

Ultimately, song listening, like songwriting, is a private passage. I have received many poetic interpretations of my songs from listeners whose ideas and connections I wish I'd made. It would have lightened my load sooner. My intention with every song was to write something that might incite me to hang on through a rough day, to remember that weird and wonderful things have already happened and, therefore, have every possibility of happening again, and to remind myself that I am not alone. Say you were having a rough day, and you happened to remember to put on music that you loved. And, say it happened to be my music, and you chose *Driver*. An image I did not use, but intended, is that of a thick rope strong enough to swing any one of us over to the other side of a troubled moment. Writer or listener, we work for each other's love. Now how's that for sentimentality?

Reprinted from Sing Out! v. 39 #3. (c) 1994 Sing Out! Corporation. All rights reserved. Used by permission. This "Courting the Muse" column was also reprinted in the book, *Songwriting and the Creative Process*. (Steve Gillette, 1995, Sing Out! Publications.).

Virginia R. Harris

### Artist's Statement: Fabric Art

Fabric is my palette, stitching my brush strokes. Piecing together varied colors, shapes, and fabrics, to express a comprehensive idea allows me a way to seek my truths through art. Using what has been deemed a traditional craft to make art, challenges many stereotypes.

Through the creative spirits in quilting I build a brand new aesthetic. My quilts are inspired by designs from many sources: traditional African and Japanese designs, origami, nature, photographs I made in the 1970s, challenges and my own vision.

I searched for a creative outlet about which I felt passion. For years I did various needlecrafts. Photography offered glimpses of that passion in the 1970s; as did writing in the 1980s. In 1991 a friend asked for quilt squares for her fiftieth birthday. I checked out books from the library and made a block. I had "come home," I felt a joy I had never before experienced. The next day I bought fabric to make a quilt.

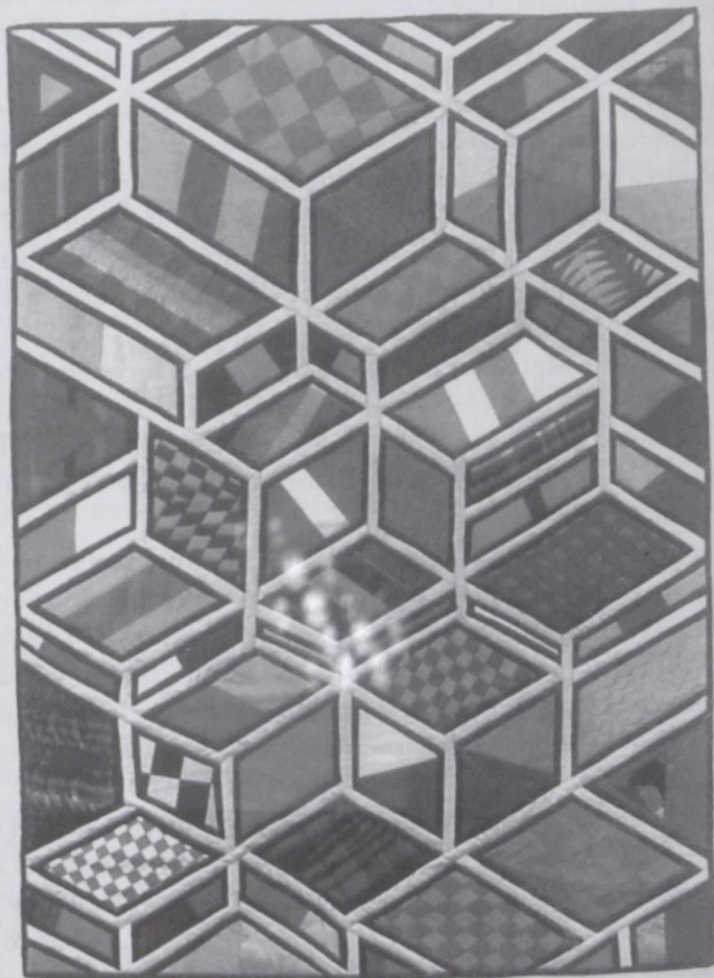
Through fabric art I embrace my own personal aesthetic. The education I acquired, the jobs I held, were the initial foundation on which my life was built. Much of that foundation has been carefully dismantled and rebuilt to fit the person I have become.



Virginia R. Harris- "Confluence" ©2002 12x17 inches. Machine pieced and quilted. Adapted from a slide taken on her Colorado rafting trip, at the confluence of the Little Colorado and Colorado rivers.

Even though some of my previous work had a strong political component, since the 2000 election, as the world situation worsened, I have been driven to make political art. Images keep coming to mind that explain actions, tie one group of events to others and sometimes even make me smile.

In these times when more and more people read less and less, the old saw, "a picture is worth a thousand words," takes on greater meaning. A visual image, not moving at warp speed, may be the only way for us to consider difficult subjects, to connect seemingly disparate events. I believe it is extremely important that artists speak out. No person, whether an artist or not, can afford to be silent, because without art civilization ceases to be viable.



Virginia R. Harris- "Retrofit 11" ©2003 30.5x41 inches. Dupioni silk. Machine pieced and quilted. Based on a Kuba Design from The Republic of Congo. Virginia writes, "I wanted to use this design in a quilt for about ten years. Three years ago I began my first attempt only to be totally defeated. This year I began again and was able to piece the quilt. The piecing still proved to be very difficult, but not impossible."

Tangren Alexander

## How Lesbian Music Changed My Life and Lesbian Art Sustained It

First of all, without women's music I might still be a married lady.<sup>1</sup> But there I was, front row center, surrounded by 1000 lesbians, hearing Holly, Meg, Margie and Chris sing of change, of woman-love and celebration, sing some of the deepest truths and most hidden hopes of my heart.<sup>2</sup>

I was a wife and mother back home. I'd been reading *Ms.*, was interested in "the women's movement," was listening for the lesbians. I had once gone to a lesbian bar and not seen much that called to me. Nor was I the baseball-playing type. For a lesbian life to truly be possible for me, there had to be more, there had to be art and music, eloquence and heart.

I had met a few local lesbians. One of those, Amy, was deep into "women's music," and wanted me to hear it. So I provided the car for our eight-hour drive to the city, and Amy got us to front row center. Among lesbians, not in ones or twos, but heavenly hosts of lesbians together, critical mass. That night I found what I was looking for.

Afterwards as I slept in my car on the street, ideas for songs kept coming to me, for the first time ever. The next day Amy took me to the women's bookstore, showed me the record bin, pointed out her favorites. "Whatever will I do with these when I get home," I worried. "They won't fit in my underwear drawer!"

In the next few months I took some time from my family, by house-sitting. It was there, alone in other people's houses, that I listened over and over to those records with names like "I Know You Know," "Imagine My Surprise," "Lavender Jane Loves Women," and to the tape Amy had made of the concert. Listened until I knew for sure that I was a lesbian, and that I had every right to be one, and that was what was wrong with staying with my husband.

Throughout the first lonely year that followed, when I moved to another town and went looking for the lesbians, I listened to women's music: Meg Christian's kind company, Chris Williamson's fey bravery, Holly Near's sweet sense, Alix Dobkin's funnybone saw me through. I went to every women's music concert, to bask again in that lesbian knowing.

I had had one woman lover before my coming out, while I was married, a short, poignant, secret affair with someone who lived far away. In erotic

dreams of her, always, there was no place to make love. In the dreams this was literally so; but also I think it means one needs a cultural place to make love. A conceptual space to be real in.

For just that reason, that first year out on my own, a piece of lesbian art came to be sacred to me: Tee Corinne's famous solarized photograph of one woman cradling another as she brings her to come, the shadows where their bodies meet transformed into hidden sources of light. I've written:<sup>3</sup> "...Once at Mother Kali's I was searching for an issue on "Lesbian Writing and Publishing" in a new journal called *Sinister Wisdom*, when I pulled out the volume with Tee's cover, saw it with such a "shock of recognition," such a sudden, powerful remembering—of what it had all been for. All this dissolving of a family, all this leaving and starting over in a whole new culture, all this meant by those words, "I am a lesbian." What it had all been for, something which my whole society conspired to make me forget was possible, something that had happened once with a woman, a kind of opening, a kind of learning, a kind of bonding, a kind of birthing, that had changed my life forever. It was a sudden remembering that seemed to jar the very floorboards of the bookstore as the world slipped back into place. I took the picture home, and, as I learn so many did, put it on my altar."

...I see that in the space of these pages I have called two events "the thing that changed my life." Did the change truly happen forever in those moments of sexual intimacy with a woman I loved, dropping me through into unexpected levels of soul? Or did the change come later, when I found a culture that made a place for celebrating that knowing? Yes. And yes.

#### Notes

1. I am using "married" as it was used in 1976, to mean "married to a partner of the opposite sex;" luckily, there are beginning to be other possible meanings today.

2. I don't know how these four singers in the Women On Wheels concert tour (Chris Williamson, Margie Adam, Holly Near, Meg Christian) would identify themselves today: times change, people change. But on that stage that night the feeling was clearly lesbian. Also, I'm sure that in the audience that night I was not the only "non-lesbian," but it felt like 1,000 lesbians, love of women ruled.

3. In my 1983 memoir, *The AutoBiography of Deborah Carr*.

Jean Weisinger

## A Photographer's Journey

When I travel I take at least a hundred of my favorites photographs from each country that I have visited to share with people. I use the images to show the spirits of people *and* also to build bridges, to teach about similarities and differences, and to give back to my community and the Universe.

I love most of all sharing my photographs with the people whom I have honored with my camera's eye. To share the work with the ones who are unable to get to a museum, a gallery or even a café, where getting a newspaper, a magazine or even a book, is not taken for granted.

I love the reaction, the amazement and disbelief that come from them when they see people like themselves in other parts of the world. That "Missing Tooth" out of Cuba could be a little boy from here in Oakland, Chicago, Africa and many other places in the world.

I love the openness of their hearts, eyes wide and innocent regardless of their age, loving the stories that come along with each photograph as I share them; like under a spice tree in Africa, in the bush with the Aborigines of Australia, near the rice fields in Bali, by the waterfalls in Jamaica, on a crowded train in India or to the elderly having their morning coffee in a McDonald's in New Orleans.

I love sharing and giving back, photographing the lives of those that cross my path. To reflect the beauty and the spirit of people and the power and strength that it gives one to see them. They honor me with their spirits, their love. So the world can see, we are all connected and we are all of one blood.

*Jean Weisinger is a self-taught African American photographer based in Oakland, California. She has traveled to Africa, Cuba, India, Mexico, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe and throughout the United States. She has exhibited in one person and selected group exhibitions in the United States, Cuba, Africa and India. Her photographs have been published in numerous films, books, and a wide range of publications as well as posters, post cards and calendars. Her photographs are in collections throughout the world.*

*Jean's vision is to travel around the world and to document the people of the earth. She believes that her photographs embrace the true spirit of people's hearts.*



Jean Weisinger- "Self-Portrait: Seeing Myself Through Alice Walker's Eyes" ©1991

Reign

*The heart drums*

*To fully understand the Drums  
One must first remember Life's dance  
Of ritual and celebration  
Seeking and finding  
The source of all creation  
Spinning and circling  
Deep in trance  
The heart and Soul links to another  
Embracing Life's Dance  
No Science, No logics  
Nothing mathematics computes  
Simply tuning the ear to the infinite humming  
Kindles one's heart to the sound of its own drumming.*

01/04

Reign

**Why Music for Women?**

Music artistically reveals the trials of initiation, used as a vehicle it brings us to express our personal experience as women of both pain and liberation. It enables our contact with Divine Feminine and bridges the physical and Spirit world, thus transforming our consciousness in the process. For many of us, music is that connecting factor, our repressed memories of ancient temples and priestesses leading ritual unravels as we pay attention to the twinkling bells on our dancing feet, to the quivers in our pelvic centers or as we undulate with intricate muscle manipulation. Our womanly bodies yearn for that sweet rhythmic connection. Music offers the tremendous opportunity to tune into the cycles and rhythms of life, the pulse of our primordial heritage.



Sarita Johnson

## Reflections on the Poster for A Lesbian Art Exhibit

Though I enjoyed working on this poster and have always been pleased with how well it turned out, it has become one of the most painful pieces of art that I have produced. Created while still in my twenties I projected my partner and I into the future, knowing we would be together well into our old age.

Art is powerful, but like most things, it can't predict an outcome. After 19 years, my partner and I are no longer together after an excruciating break-up. Interestingly enough *Sinister Wisdom's* request for this piece comes at a time when my ex-partner and I are wending our way back as friends. In this way my art is like those mountains or clouds that follow from far away as I travel through life.



## FOR LOVE OF WOMEN A LESBIAN ART EXHIBIT

Exhibition Dates: June 4-27, 1982

Opening Reception: Friday, June 11, 6-8 pm

VIDA GALLERY, THE WOMEN'S BUILDING OF THE BAY AREA  
3643 18th STREET, SAN FRANCISCO CA 94110

Gallery Hours: Wed-Fri 2-7 pm and Sat 12-5 pm

Happy/L.A. Hyder

### Vivid

*I celebrate being a lesbian artist...an artist lesbian...  
 who may  
 or may not  
 have vivid lesbian imagery in my work  
 yet  
 who  
 always  
 has vivid lesbian energy in my work.*

I have had the honor of bringing visual art by lesbians to a wide audience of viewers for a number of years. The experience of meeting so many lesbians on journeys where artistic expression was a mainstay of their passion is one I treasure.

Throughout these fifteen years with Lesbians in the Visual Arts (LVA), I also made art. I went from photographing exclusively in black & white to photographing exclusively in color, mainly architectural and natural detail, and I produced two large-scale installations, both focusing on being lesbian in this world, and two mixed media pieces, one about being female in this world and one about being of Arabic descent. While some of my photographic images are definitely sensual, my photographs do not carry the political weight of my installations and mixed media work. I spent over a year contemplating the value of producing the photographs I do while the world is in such a desperate and horrifying place, coming to understand how much my collectors value my work in their lives as places of rest, sanity and imagination.

What I receive from lesbian culture, I reflect. My perceptions are made from what I know and who I have around me and I am sometimes a hard taskmaster when it comes to the mainstream presentation of us to the world. (For instance, I wonder if I am the only lesbian in the world to truly hate the Roseanne/Marielle kiss; am I the only one to notice Roseanne wiping her mouth? ....now that's another article altogether. Or is it? Here, let me put it into one paragraph:

During that era, Roseanne's show was where you would find the lesbians on primetime. For me, all the positive depictions were wiped out with that kiss—it told her fan base....it may be alright to work with one, but you sure as hell don't wanna kiss one cuz they're nasty. Considering the nastiness

of Roseanne's character, that was, and still is in reruns, quite an insult. The fact that it gets so much play as the first real lesbian kiss on tv is sad indeed.)

Part of my work as a cultural activist is to be seen as a lesbian whether my work is lesbian-focused or not. Exhibiting in New York recently, my curator wanted me to tone down my resume, saying I didn't need to include the political. Since my resume only included art-focused entries, I guessed she meant the entries identified lesbian and feminist. I did edit my resume to bring it to fewer pages; however, I included each lesbian and feminist entry, considering them essential to my life and to my work as an artist. And, anyone who is so attracted to my work they are considering to buy it, and then decide not to because of who I am and how I be in the world, I don't want to have my art...it's that simple.

Next month I am offering my installation "Lesbian touch is ancient..." to an exhibition titled Homomuseum in honor of Sappho. LTA is a 12' x 12' installation of hanging banners of my own erotic writing, hand painted, and photographs digitally imprinted on silk. I also have a desire to make a short film of this installation. My reasoning wraps around the fact that visual art is seen in exhibition for finite periods of time. And while most two dimensional work can be shown to people out of exhibition, it is rare to exhibit large installations more than once or twice and very hard to show to anyone outside of exhibition. (Yes, there are always slides and photographs of installations, but they are not the same.) With LTA, you can walk through the banners looking at the images, reading the text, and watching the banners wave softly in reaction to your own movement.

We are my target audience for this film through the festivals, celebrating our sensuality and sexuality through this art piece and sharing this art piece with a larger audience than it would ever get otherwise. This is political art.

Lesbian culture is being built every day. I am excited to be part of it.

LVA : Lesbians in the Visual Arts, an advocacy and networking organization I founded in 1990. Visit [www.lesbianarts.org](http://www.lesbianarts.org).

Judy Freespirit

## The First National Lesbian Feminist Conference

I was thirty-seven years old and had been identifying myself as a “political lesbian” for two years when I decided to attend the 1973 Lesbian Feminist Conference being held at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles). What I meant by political lesbian was that I had made a political decision to call myself a lesbian although I had never had a relationship with a woman. I had made that decision because around that time the National Organization for Women had purged all the lesbians. Rita Mae Brown, one of the purged and a dyke not easily silenced, spoke and wrote articles saying that if every woman stood up when they asked, “Who are the Lesbians” then men would not be able to divide us. Sort of like what the King of Denmark did during the Nazi occupation of that country. As a Jew I understood the concept very well, so it made sense to me. I started calling myself a lesbian, wearing dyke buttons, going to Lesbian Feminist meetings at the Women’s Center. I also started thinking about being sexual with women, but still hadn’t figured out how to connect. My friends told me it had to do with attitude and the way I dressed. While everyone else was in jeans or overalls and plaid flannel shirts, I was still wearing polyester pants suits. Maybe that’s why I couldn’t find a lover. Maybe I really wasn’t a lesbian. Maybe I was just too scared to find out. Still, I wanted to be there so I signed up for the conference.

The organizers had expected about four hundred lesbians, mostly locals, to show up for this first time ever national lesbian feminist conference. Much to their dismay and delight over twelve hundred arrived from all over the country.

The conference opening on Friday night was overwhelming. There was so much happening I could barely get my bearings. I was among over a thousand lesbians yet I felt totally alone. There was so much anger there, over the preoperative, male-to-female transsexual lesbian who was scheduled to perform on the first night, over the racism of the organizers, over class issues, and anti-Semitism. Women in the audience were shouting at the organizers on stage, stopping the process over and over as the conference took place. It seemed to me that while we were there to free ourselves we were tearing each other apart instead. I was new to all this and didn’t really understand what all the brouhaha was about. A knot in the pit of my stom-

ach was my only companion that weekend. I was not a happy camper.

Since I was so overwhelmed I decided to leave the campus on Saturday afternoon and escape to the first air conditioned movie I could find. Unfortunately I was not to be calmed, as the first theater I came to was playing Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*, a grim story of three sisters, one of whom was dying of cancer.

That evening I returned to the huge lecture hall at UCLA to see a performance by four lesbians who had driven in a new van (gifted to them by Joan Nixon, a supporter) all the way from Chicago to be there. When they arrived on Friday they were told they could only have fifteen minutes on the stage at the performance that night, and they were furious, demanding that they be given more time to perform. So the organizers had arranged for them to play a special Saturday night performance in the big lecture hall where the plenary sessions were held. The group called itself "Family of Woman." There were four musicians but I only remember Linda Shear who played the piano and sang, and the violinist, who played the violin gypsy style, like my Zadie.

The audience was electrified by the music as the energy in the room got higher and higher as the evening progressed. Finally they struck up their theme song, "Family of Woman" by Linda Shear, and the entire audience began to undulate to the music.

*Looking through a future window,  
breathing in the coolness of the  
young moon, all the colors of the shifting,  
once dark sky.  
Women passing through the world,  
sharing tears and struggle  
with the strength of miles behind -  
We are bringing in the dawn.*

My heart was beating fast, my skin tingling. Women all over the hall were rising and moving to the music. Some women had pulled off their shirts and were dancing topless, singly, in pairs and in groups of three or four together in the aisles. I had never seen any thing like it. I was perspiring profusely. My eyes were full of tears I didn't understand. I sat riveted in my seat, though my body was telling me to jump up and dance and sing along with the music.

*Family of Woman we've begun  
Family of Woman we will become  
Family of Woman  
we are tearing down the walls  
Family of Woman  
we are more than slaves and dolls  
Women sing of Mountain moving days  
the day is now  
Armies made of lovers cannot fail  
The woman order is changing  
and the future time is sung  
Sisters I can feel you,  
I can touch you,  
I can need,  
I can kiss you,  
I can love you.*

Wave after wave of ecstasy was welling up inside me. It was a peak experience, like the moment I first saw my baby in the delivery room, but this time I did not feel ashamed of my feelings. I did not turn them off. This time I was one with the band, with the music, with the women in the room. A profound sense of joy swept over me as I merged with the music, with the hundreds of lesbians, with some otherworldly spirit I had never known before.

For that night, at least, sisterhood really was powerful.

Words to "Family of Woman" printed with permission from Linda Shear.

Note from Linda Shear: The names of the other musicians were: violin - Joan Capra, drums - Ella Szekely, bass - Jule Handler along with Michelle Brody singing original songs and Susan Kahn - sound. Other members of the band who weren't present in LA were Susan Abod and Sherry Jenkins.

Becky Banasiak Code

## Georgia O'Keeffe: Releasing the Spirit

Yesterday I found myself crying in the Columbus Museum of Art as I viewed the exhibit entitled, "Georgia O'Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place." My partner and I had made a special trip to the big city in the middle of the week in order to see it. She may not completely understand but she is sensitive to my inexplicably deep attraction to O'Keeffe's life and her work. This was her early Christmas present to me.

I was first introduced to the art of Georgia O'Keeffe in the mid-1990's when a friend sent me a postcard displaying one of O'Keeffe's famous paintings of a cow's skull entitled, "Red, White, and Blue," (1931). As a scientist, I had studied plenty of skull bones in my career yet I was so intrigued by O'Keeffe's rendering of this image that I went to the college library for information about the artist. There I found and quickly devoured a book about O'Keeffe's life when I should have been working on experiments in my laboratory.

In the following years, I would go to bookstores and instead of browsing in the science section, I'd find myself hurrying straight for the art section to read the latest book about this remarkable spirit named O'Keeffe. One October, I drove across the state to Canyon, Texas to visit the college where she had taught art classes and to hike the trails of Palo Duro Canyon that had inspired some of her earlier work. Another time I went in search of her home in Abiquiu, New Mexico just to see where she lived, only to find that one needed to make a reservation several months in advance to take the tour. It wasn't until after I had moved to Ohio that I was finally able to make a special trip back to Abiquiu to tour the inside of her home and studio—more than four years later.

I have been trained as a neurobiologist but when I first read about O'Keeffe's life, there were some similarities that struck me as especially significant: she had moved from the East to take a teaching position in Texas much as I had done; while there, she had fallen in love with the land and the seemingly limitless sky of the desert Southwest much as I had done; and she had lived apart from her husband for long periods of time just as I had during most of my married life. When I first became acquainted with O'Keeffe's work, I was struggling with my own internalized homophobia. Although O'Keeffe's sexual orientation might be debated by those who somehow consider it important, it was how passionately she seemed to live her

life that, in part, gave me the courage to eventually pursue my own passions—to resign my faculty position in order to become a writer, and to fall in love with another woman—two things I had always dreamed about, but refused to consider, ever since I was a kid.

Viewing O’Keeffe’s New Mexico landscapes in the art gallery that day, I was overcome by a nameless emotion, unplanned, unpremeditated. It wasn’t until after I had left the exhibit that I tried to explain my tears, more to myself than to my partner. It seemed that I wasn’t merely caught up with the beauty of O’Keeffe’s work—I had fallen in love with her paintings of New Mexico long before when I had first moved to Texas. It wasn’t just longing to be back hiking in New Mexico as I had done frequently when I still lived out West. And it was not just gratitude for being in this special place on this crisp December day with a loving partner who wanted to share this experience with me.

Could this emotion be the essence of art, of that which passes between people and endures across the vast plains of time and space? We each extract our own particular meanings from our individual experiences and I’m sure that that part of the country held different meanings for O’Keeffe and me, meanings that changed for us each time we found ourselves embraced by the unembarrassed spirit of the Land of Enchantment. Her aesthetic for the New Mexico landscape may have been similar to mine—or not. But the fact that something about the land is capable of invoking a certain kind of feeling—a certain kind of energy—at all, perhaps approximates more closely the essence that endures, the thing that connects artist, subject and viewer.

Keeping that connection alive, keeping that open channel—that willingness to experience that energy in the first place—to the land or whatever it is that inspires you, then wanting to share it with others—feeling compelled to share it with others—is perhaps what artists are all about. Yet art is, on some level, doing it for yourself, all for yourself, only for yourself. O’Keeffe said about the Pedernal: “God told me if I painted that mountain often enough, He’d give it to me.”

How is it then, that long after you’re dead, that work of yours (which isn’t really yours, having been inspired by the beauty, the spirit, the essence of the land, its colors, shapes and shadows), often does, as an unintended consequence, transcend time and space to invoke similar feelings in those who view it? How is that possible? It’s surely not something that can be visualized at the time. It can’t be framed. There is no paint-by-number, stay-within-the-lines kind of template to follow. It’s a messy process of sitting down with your work, with what *draws you*—even if you think you’re draw-



ing *it*—whether it be a blue-flat-topped mountain or a giant calla lily. You don't analyze, you don't label, you don't try to be clever or come up with answers or even with a plan. You just paint, draw, sing, dance, play, write what you feel at that moment—honestly, completely, with integrity. Any thought of a possible audience for your work can ruin it.

Often it's difficult to express in words the emotions that we feel. Perhaps O'Keeffe was no different: while viewing her paintings I had a sense of her striving to express her feelings—then and there, on that particular day in mid-December—and using paint, no less. In the sacred hush of that art museum, I could almost feel her struggle resonating within me, her grappling to get the colors, hues and textures of the red hills down just right in the constantly changing light of the high desert air. Each painting different yet similar in their ability to pluck me from the gallery couch and cloak me in the heart of the canyons and arroyos she loved so passionately, into the heart of her heart which is the heart of the same land full of the same limitless space, the same expansive pulsating spirit that flows through us all. That draw, that pull which keeps me in touch with the spirit of that place, that melting of barriers between me and the rest of the universe—perhaps it was those boundaries that dissolved into tears as I viewed the O'Keeffe exhibit with my partner.

Rumi, the Sufi poet and mystic, says, "The most living thing is when the eyes of two lovers meet and in what passes between them then." In retrospect, what passed between O'Keeffe and me that afternoon, what touched my heart across the vast expanse of time and space between her painting those hills around Ghost Ranch, New Mexico and my viewing them that day in Columbus, Ohio, and across our different generational viewpoints and cultural perspectives, seemed to me to be such a living, such a powerful thing.

How can we capture this spirit that reaches out to us in so many ways if only we would pay attention, if only we would want to be connected, if only we want to be so embraced? For to have any preconceived idea of what that connection even looks like, feels like, sounds like, would, a priori, foreclose on its infinitely abundant possibilities and transform it into just another empty commodity to pursue and possess. I couldn't have imagined before entering the Columbus Museum of Art that I'd be crying at the sight of O'Keeffe's paintings, many that I had seen before in books and at other exhibits in Dallas, Santa Fe and Ft. Wayne. I couldn't have foreseen what my eyes would be open to, what my heart would be opened to, that day as I sat in the heart of that place.

Perhaps I should recognize my human inadequacies, in attempting to capture a spirit that can't be captivated. Perhaps I should resist the urge to explain the unexplainable, to analyze the unanalyzable, to slap a label on the undefinable and just let those tears be, to let them be what they were. But maybe it's the same spirit that's calling me to try—it feels good to try—to stretch myself beyond self-imposed and socially enforced emotional borders to more accurately describe my feelings, to try to connect with other readers who might feel similarly about O'Keeffe's work, spirit, and connection to the Land of Enchantment. In the messy process of trying to capture on paper what I'm feeling, perhaps then it can be released. Perhaps then it can take wing and fly on in the limitless sky that connects us all.

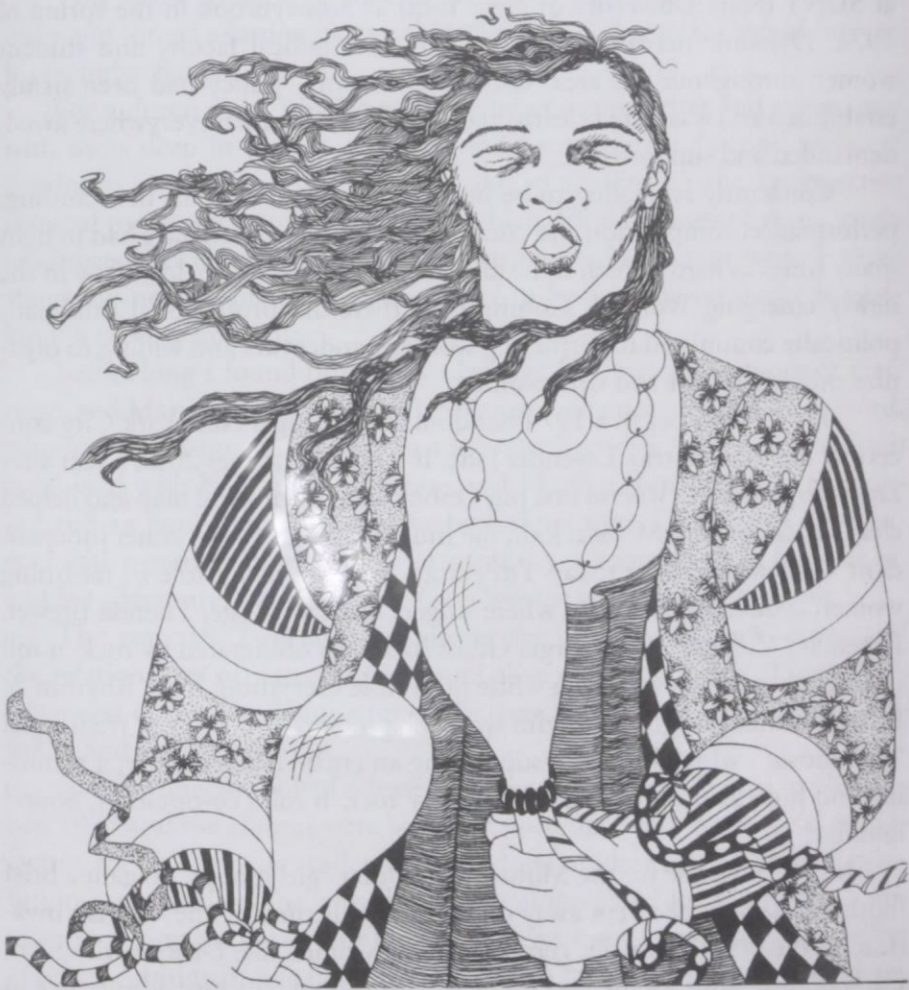
Becky Banasiak Code

### *New Mexico Road*

*Where do you go to find the New Mexico Road  
that winds around your desert heart  
and woos you with its shooting stars  
to a land of piercing blue hope?  
Cassiopeia knows, by the hue of the desert rose  
that blooms in the evening beyond the snows  
of the Sangre de Christos,  
the Blood of Christ Mountain, that spoons  
her butt up to the belly of the dunes  
at her base – a contradiction of space  
held tenderly in place  
by the caress of a spiritual hand,  
where animal bones are bleached true on red stones,  
where dreams dance on the wide open land.*

*How do you find the New Mexico Road  
that buckles below O'Keeffe's studio  
where she paints the bones she finds when she roams  
in the canyons and arroyos  
beyond the faux adobe walls of husband and home?  
She mounts her ladder to the sky,  
free to fly in the fearless night  
like lightning laughing from peak to peak,  
like lightning connecting her to me.*

*How do I find my New Mexico Road?  
Can I simply let go and slip through the hole  
of my own pelvis of blue,  
dissolving into colors and hues  
to paint the pillows of land,  
to let my spirit expand in the limitless light,  
to swirl with New Mexico sand?*



Sudie Rakusin "Untitled 2"

Alix Dobkin

## The Adventures of Lavender Jane

I want to tell you how my early albums came about and give you a sense of the world I came out into, and how I first began to have my say in Lesbian culture. *Lavender Jane Loves Women's* release prompted many memorable and public moments, as Kay Gardner and I, either as a duo or with one bassist or another, traveled from college to college, community to community in and around New York City. One unforgettable concert occurred at SUNY (State University of New York) at Stonybrook in the spring of 1974. Dynamic networks connected us with radical faculty and student women throughout the area. Our "women-only" policy had been firmly established and was stated clearly in our contract. Women everywhere loved, demanded and supported it.

"Constantly struggling to be heard over male musicians in recording, performance, composition and commercial music, women have had to fight many times as hard as men to be taken seriously in these fields. Now in the newly emerging Women's Community, there are professional musicians politically committed to furthering women's endeavors and willing to organize projects by, for and with women."

This is how I began a 1974 handbill advertising a New York City concert by the Lesbian trio, Lavender Jane. It is dated October 26th, a year after *Lavender Jane Loves Women* first put Lesbians on the musical map and helped clear a path for Ani, Melissa, k.d., the Indigo Girls and every other independent woman recording today. I'm ecstatic to have had a role in returning women's voices to the charts where singers like Patti Page, Theresa Brewer, Rosemary Clooney and Georgia Gibbs had been obliterated by rock 'n roll during the mid 50s when the white guys stole everything from Rhythm & Blues but the strong, non-victim women's presence, inherent in traditional "race music", which had been supporting an entire Black culture, a recording and broadcast industry eliminated by rock 'n roll's co-optation. Sound familiar?

It took a decade for the Motown and other "girl groups" to gain a brief foothold, only to be swept away once again, this time by the "British invasion" of the 60s. Eventually, certain brilliant women like Dusty Springfield, Carly Simon, Janis Joplin, and Joni Mitchell gained reluctant admittance to the boys club of pop music, but not without cost. Unrelenting male supremacy, intimidation and punishment for any sign of independence kept

women in line and men in the spotlight. A few female pop stars were permitted to tiptoe around its margins, enjoying occasional spillover if they behaved themselves. Janis Ian, a bright and unpretentious young folksinger and acquaintance from the Gaslight in Greenwich Village, joined the short list of "one-hit" female artists whose songs dared stray from the Subject of men, a rare exception to prove the rule of men over dominant culture.

But outside the mainstream and far beyond masculine sensibility or imagination, a new world had been born without men and with an audience of women who wanted something more. So we made ourselves a culture and a community to support it.

This whole thing began late in the 1960s when Lesbianism met feminism and forged a lasting partnership that would change the world forever. It certainly changed me.

For a dozen years I had made a living as a songwriter and entertainer with roots deep in protest and folk traditions, but the "second wave" of Feminism hit me like a ton of bricks, and its genuinely radical perspective inspired me to write and sing the love which, for thousands of years, barely recognized, let alone whispered, its own name. No matter what I wrote about my new Lesbian life, it was going to be original, unique, one-of-a-kind: a creative gold mine.

Before long I found flutist Kay Gardner, like myself, fresh out of marriage, and Marilyn Ries, a lifelong Lesbian and engineer of the spoken word, who had in her possession keys to a four track studio. My ethnic tradition combined with Kay's classical genius and Marilyn Ries' technical risk-taking and an enthusiastic gang of Lesbian supporters. Our shared inexperience with recording music was equaled only by our passion for it, for women, and for adventure. *Lavender Jane Loves Women* was the vibrant result.

The years 1972-78 changed forever the consciousness of women and the relationships of virtually every soul alive on planet Earth. Those years generated current Lesbian community, power, privilege, entitlement, visibility and yes, recognition.

Kay Gardner and I had released *Lavender Jane Loves Women* in November, 1973 and the albums were being snapped up as fast as we could manufacture them. The male academic establishment, like every other male institution around the globe, was thoroughly unprepared for the raging feminism sweeping northeast campuses and overturning one ivory tower after another. Administrations were overwhelmed by hordes of female students (and sometimes professors) who seized control of student programming and booked Lavender Jane for standing room crowds of fearless, fire-breathing

students driven by passions unimaginable to young people nowadays. Whole dorms were coming out, women-only space ruled, and legions of girls kicked butt big time in its defense. Those who lived through it know I'm not exaggerating. We kept busy playing at one university after another for wildly enthusiastic women who could not get enough of Lesbian culture. The excitement of the time defies description and provides the context for the story of why I started singing solely for women.

Lavender Jane was performing in concert at Brooklyn College and something did not feel right. My stomach was becoming more and more upset but I didn't know why until, towards the end of the performance, I noticed the handful of curious young men scattered quietly throughout the audience. A-hah! The light bulb lit up. They didn't belong there! That was it! None of our music related to them. Their presence, I suddenly realized, acted as static interference and disrupted the highly charged flow of female energy.

"I would appreciate it if you men in the audience would please leave the concert now," I said politely. Kay shot me a puzzled look since I had not mentioned anything of the kind to her. I shrugged, some women applauded, the men left, my stomachache disappeared, and for ten years I performed exclusively for women-only audiences.

An epiphany comes to mind. It happened two years earlier after I had abandoned my folksinging career to have a baby, joined a consciousness-raising group, separated from my husband and began to rethink my life. During pregnancy I had begun writing a few songs describing the changes I was experiencing. I made the decision to have a happy life and men disappeared from it. Just like that. My C-R group and the earth-shaking discovery of "the personal is political" had transformed everything, including my writing, and women were suddenly central to my life.

One night as I stood by Adrian's crib in my living room, a vision came to me. I saw a sea of women's faces. They were my audience. But what did this mean? I had been completely unconscious of the fact that every previous audience consisted entirely of MEN accompanied by an utterly inconsequential sprinkling of females. It wasn't until the Brooklyn College concert, two years later, that I was able to understand the meaning of that visionary moment and translate it into reality.

Compiled from *Minstrel Blood* columns in the "Reflections" section of *Chicago Outlines*; January, 1998; [www.Windycitytimes.com](http://www.Windycitytimes.com)

Alix Dobkin

## The Further Adventures of Lavender Jane

Around Valentines Day of 1974, Lavender Jane was booked into Douglas, the recently co-ed Women's auxiliary to Rutgers College in New Jersey. The hall was jammed with over four hundred charged-up female students. Only three months since its release, *Lavender Jane Loves Women* had been circulating throughout the Douglas dorms and the air crackled with anticipation. Kay Gardner and I were going over our set in the lobby when I looked up and saw trouble storming towards us in the form of the outraged President of the Student Government flanked by two uncomfortable looking young men and our new and now deeply distressed booker.

"You've GOT to let these men into this show or we have to CANCEL it!" The President was really angry. "Unless 'women-only' is ADVERTISED in ADVANCE it's against College rules!" She crossed her arms and glared at me. "Women-only' wasn't advertised so I invited my friends!" I glared at our booker who had signed the contract. She returned a helpless shrug. Although I had repeatedly emphasized the point when I hired her, she had neglected to include 'women-only' in our contract, thinking it didn't matter. "There's nothing we can do about it now. We HAVE to let men in," she whined. It seemed futile, but I refused to give in. "We need to think about this," I told them, trying to buy time. The President stormed off with her friends.

Jammed into the room as they were and waiting for the show to begin, the audience was growing increasingly restless. "It won't make any difference if there are a few men in the audience," Kay sighed. "Ignore them. It'll be fine."

But it wasn't fine. The audience expected a women-only show and didn't care about college rules. Plus, the thought of men being there upset my stomach. But what could I do? I was afraid that without the support of Kay and Barbara—our pointedly indifferent bass player—women's space would be compromised. I sat and pondered. Kay looked disgusted, "Let's just do it," she grumbled.

My mind kept returning to the students. "It's THEIR concert," I told myself, "so let THEM decide what to do." I walked into the hall, climbed up onto the stage, took the mike and put the problem to the women in the room. "This is YOUR concert," I began, and proceeded to explain our dilemma of not having advertised "women-only" in advance. "What do YOU think about this? What kind of experience do YOU want?" I asked them.

One after another the women came up and explained why they needed the space to be exclusively for women. They were passionate and funny, angry and

articulate. "This isn't 'reverse-sexism' because sexism is an institution of power-over, and women aren't excluding men to maintain power over them," a woman explained. I hadn't thought that through before, nor had it occurred to me that, as another woman put it, "The definition of a slave is that the master always has access."

Everyone wanted a say. The line for the mic stretched alongside clusters of women, many sitting on each other's laps or leaning against each other's knees through the darkened room to the back wall. The air was alive with excitement and anticipated controversy but there wasn't any. No one wanted men in the room.

I spotted Barbara, ready to take her turn and thought to myself, "Uh-oh! But she surprised me. "There will always be some woman ready to take care of men," my bass player declared. "Every woman shouldn't have to worry about every man's feelings because there will always be plenty of women to do that and hold their hands for them. This is OUR space. We need it and we have a right to it!" The audience roared their agreement for a truly thrilling moment.

Then, an even more amazing thing happened, the Student Government President approached the stage to speak. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she took the microphone. The hall went silent in the drama of the moment.

"I have listened to you all and you have changed my mind," she told us, her voice shaky with feeling. "I now realize that this needs to be a women-only concert, but we also have to abide by the College rules, and I've figured out how to do it," she told the stunned crowd. "We have to cancel this concert and then hold another one which WILL be advertised 'women-only.'" The room buzzed. "Someone make a sign saying that the "new" concert is for 'women-only' and post it on the door. Then we can all come back in and have our concert. Everyone leave the room now," she directed.

The room exploded, emptied, re-grouped, piled back in, and let me tell you, this was a sensational evening. Lavender Jane could do no wrong. Audience and performers were in perfect synchronicity, for it truly was everyone's concert and everyone felt their ownership of the event. They loved every minute of it.

Even now I meet women who were there. They tell me, eyes beaming, "I'll never forget that night!" I've met several couples who say, "You know, we first met at that concert. It was one of the best nights of our lives!"

Mine too.

Compiled from *Minstrel Blood* columns in the "Reflections" section of *Chicago Outlines*; January, 1998; [www.Windycitytimes.com](http://www.Windycitytimes.com)



Ruth Mountaingrove

## Lesbian and Art

Being a lesbian artist is important to me because I can tell the world what being a lesbian is like, at least out of my experience and imagination.

When I moved to Oregon in 1971, I had just come out. I had already been writing feminist songs and singing them in gatherings and coffee houses in Philadelphia, in New Jersey, Connecticut and in Toronto Canada. In the celebration in August of that year of women getting the right to vote, I sang my feminist songs before a crowd of 7,000 with the story on the 6 o'clock news.

I had been working full time at the Women's Center helping to write and edit a woman's newspaper, *Awake and Move*. I was in charge of the Speakers Bureau, helped a lesbian group to get started, and was part of another group meeting for nine months to create a space for battered women.

My songs were about inequities: *Why Are Women Paid Less Than Men*, *What Do The Women Want? (Don't we give it all to you?)* *Civil Rights: I'm Getting To Be Ashamed Of The Color Of My Skin*, *Who Killed This Woman?* about laws against abortion. *Invisible Women* was a song about the absence of women in the boardrooms of corporations, and mastheads of magazines.

Then I fell in love with a woman and moved to the West coast, wrote songs, *Gypsy (come and live with me)*, *Moon Song*, *Love Song*, living in the commune and I wrote *Patience* and *Sarah*, *Walking the Dirt Road in the Rain*, *Two Purple Dragons*. *Celebration Songs: Winter and Summer Solstice, Fall and Spring Equinox*. And covering both ends of menstruation, *Song for Menarche*, onset of menstruation, and *We Are Like Trees, (blown by the winds of time)* for the cessation, menopause.

At that time we were living at the Krisnamurti based commune Mountain Grove, and I was singing to small groups of communards. When we were evicted from Mountain Grove, we explored women's space from Seattle to San Diego. In 1972 we had gone to a women's festival outside of Nevada City, California. Out of that grew the first spirituality festival held on women's land outside of Wolf Creek, Oregon. When the lesbians came up from Albion, California to be part of the festival, they said they wanted to do an issue of *Country Women* on this theme and invited us to come down to help. We not only helped, we learned production and by the time their festival was over, *WomanSpirit* had been conceived. In 1974 with the help of a \$1000 grant from Barbara Altar, we birthed the first issue of *WomanSpirit* with the Fall Equinox. We went on to publish 40 issues on Equinoxes and Solstices.

I continued writing my songs: *No Woman's Land*, few lesbians owned land at that time, the exception being Womanshare and Rainbow's End.

We were evicted from the commune for being lesbians, though of course that wasn't given as the reason. A lot of lesbians had been coming to see us at Mountain Grove, and this was annoying the heterosexual members. Gay men came to our rescue and offered an 8' x 8' sauna meditation cabin. Meanwhile we were still looking for a place to live, and as it turned out we lived in that cabin for five years.

I sang up and down the West coast, from Seattle, to Portland, to Eugene in coffee houses and women's centers: The Bakery in Seattle, Portland women's center, Gertrude's in Eugene, coffeehouse in Albion, Full Moon and Artemis in San Francisco and Las Hermanas in San Diego. In Washington DC the Double XX women's recording company made a cassette for me that many women may still have.

We were also evicted from the gay men's land, not because we were lesbians but because producing *WomanSpirit* on their land attracted many women to come visit, to come work on the magazine. After we had built an office in what had been a chicken coop in the barn with the gay boys' encouragement, the gay owner of the land told us we had to leave.

At this point we bought Rootworks, a fairly primitive land by today's standards: ramshackle buildings and outhouses, no water, no electricity, no phone. Living at Rootworks meant we no longer had to travel to make the magazine. Prior to this we had traveled to Boston where I sang to and with the Boston Women's Chorus directed by Carolyn McDade.

Now all the this time I was also photographing, designing darkrooms, in Mountain Grove, in the gay men's bathroom and then a room in their barn and in the cabin at Rootworks, and finally in the Rootworks barn. The University of Oregon now has the negatives, 35mm, 2 1/4 and 4" x 5" as well as the traveling exhibition: all the photographs from the thirteen years in Oregon.

In 1977 my second poetry book was published. It was called *For Those Who Cannot Sleep*, with illustrations by Chrystos. My first book *Rhythms of Spring* was published in 1946 in New Hope, Pennsylvania. My songbook *Turned On Woman* was published in 1975. My lesbian short stories have been published in lesbian anthologies. My essays were published in *Common Lives Lesbian Lives* and in *Sinister Wisdom* #53, the Old Lesbians issue.

Having been evicted in a break up with my partner Jean, *WomanSpirit* ended in 1984 as did *The Blatant Image*, a photographic magazine for lesbian and feminist photographers. Also ending were the Ovulars, the summer photography workshops for mostly lesbian photographers who came from all over the US for a week of sharing

In Arcata I enrolled at Humboldt State University and decided to work for a Master's in Art and Photography which I received in 1990 for my work in a photographic medium I call Drawing with Light.

While I was out in the lesbian community and even at college, most of the Art department was male. There were two women out of twenty on the faculty. I did not want to expose my lesbian portraits, intimate or not, to that gaze. Instead I created abstract art in the darkroom.

I also continued writing poetry, lesbian mostly, reading at college and at local watering holes at open mike or as a Featured Poet. Most recently I was invited to read at the celebration of the new minor in Lesbian and Gay studies at Humboldt State University in Spring of 2004.

Meanwhile in 2000, I took a course in play writing and began to write plays. One was about two lesbians and a cat, *The CAT*, a one-act play was produced at the World Premiere Theatre in Eureka, California as part of a celebration of women's work. I received my MA in Theatre Production with an emphasis in play writing in 2002.

My last work for my Master's was a performance piece and the material came from interviewing local lesbians, both single and in couples. One of the women I interviewed had lost her partner to spinal cancer, one woman was divorced, two of the lesbians were city dykes, and two living in the country.

Out of this I wrote my performance piece using a variety of hats to represent the characters and separated each character with lesbian poems. I called the work *HATS* and performed it at the monthly Lesbohemian coffeehouse.

I have also sung my songs at the coffeehouse to celebrate Gay Pride. Currently I take photographs with my digital camera, transfer them into Photoshop and print them. I also create work in Photoshop much like Drawing with Light and use filters to create new work from that base.

While it would appear that I have accomplished a great deal in the time between 1968 and 1984, most of it could not have been possible without the help of many other lesbians: Tee Corrine, who was influential in the Ovulars sharing her knowledge in workshops and being part of *The Blatant Image* as well as contributing illustrations to *WomanSpirit* and Caroline Overman, who both wrote and edited copy for both magazines.

And Jean Mountaingrove who was more than my partner in *WomanSpirit*, *The Blatant Image*, and the poetry and songbook for which she did the layout. None of this would have happened without our shared vision and energy.

Mary Meriam

Sonata

(presto)

hello I wave I shake arouse  
a rose hello, a slow hello  
so kiss  
we begin kind kisses to begin  
once more stay and sleep  
time again and twice  
each a kiss a note a wave  
all songs sweeping some fluttering  
of hearts in breasts  
I fall on you  
underneath me you are low and looming  
swooning breasts  
I lick the tips  
I press your lips  
compact tits  
starting hot-spread  
like waves like like windy waves  
alone lifting kisses one by one

(adagio)

You you  
want to hold me  
you say I am pretty  
where does that leave me?

Dance  
and I will sing

You say there is no time

It made me desperate  
for you  
for me  
and without hope

Now there is Violet surrounded by  
violets  
surrounding my heart

Now there is time  
for me for you  
Dance  
and I will sing  
Slowly  
Adagio

(finale)

she calls me sybarite  
pleasure-seeker  
land of voluptuous love  
she is my lover

we lie in the light-filled  
porch singing  
Christ Lag in Todesbanden  
heads pressed together

all winter my face  
skin-stretches until  
lines form around  
the corners of a tight smile

I'm sinking  
she cannot save me  
I sink

at the very bottom  
I become a sea-anemone

she drifts away on  
salty-water currents  
I make with my weeping



Sudie Rakusin 2003

©Sudie Rakusin 2003

Sudie Rakusin "Untitled 3"

Ona Marae

## A Song of the Soul

The campfire popped sparks that flew into the sky, mixing with the millions of stars visible from the rim of the canyon. Ten 14-year-olds and two 20-year-old Girl Scout Counselors with guitars sat watching the vast night.

That night we learned a new song: Song of the Soul. It fed the imagination and barely-under-the-surface semi-romantic feelings of young girls captured by magic and passion for each other and life. For some of us, it was even more magic than for the others.

I went home from camp that year looking for more music by that musician, Cris Williamson. Stuck in rural Kansas, I would use my family's infrequent trips to the nearest city's mall to search for something I couldn't name. Music store after music store turned me away with nothing.

But months later, I found an album that made my heart leap in my throat. "Cris and Meg at Carnegie Hall." They both wore tuxedos. What did this mean? This and other albums by Cris Williamson and Meg Christian offered song titles that were as blatant as "Sweet, Darling Woman" and as subtle as "The Changer and the Changed."

I hesitated for months, afraid that if I bought these records, my parents would discover them. "Sweet Darlin' Woman," sung by a woman, was not something to which I wanted my mother listening. I caressed the covers at the music store and surreptitiously read the lyrics, dreaming of the day I would be able to listen freely. My "best friend" through years at camp and I would discuss the music in code, both afraid to speak freely what we felt for fear it would be too much for the other.

Life became too much and my feelings for other girls and women got caught in the swirling of fighting a family that demanded too much and gave too little. I pushed down my questions about myself and focused on surviving and escaping. A scholarship to a church-related college got me out of the house, but into an environment where, once again, those magical, emotionally intimate relationships with women were spoken only in code.

Slow bloomer that I am, it wasn't until I was 22 that I finally bought that album. A new world opened to me. Cris and Meg led to Margie Adam and Holly Near. The feelings I had finally were given a vocabu-

lary. The music gave me permission to speak my feelings and desires. Women's music gave me the magic of women's love.

I was 23 then, and knew only a couple of other lesbians, all who were in relationships with each other. My music was the only outlet I had. And again, music solved the problem.

I knew I wanted to touch and hold other women. But how? Music gave me an opportunity. This time it wasn't Women's Music, but Country Western. What an odd outlet for a budding lesbian! It made me laugh at first: that the staid, common folk, drinking-too-much-beer, cheating-on-your-man music was my next step. I went to a women's Country Western bar in Denver, my new home. I stood in wonder, watching women holding women, spinning around the dance floor. Now this I could do. Two-stepping gave me the answers. I knew where to put my hands, what to do with my feet. I'm sure Reba and Wynona never knew how changing their pronouns helped a young lesbian blossom!

As I grew in the lesbian community, my musical tastes grew also. All of those women we just knew must be, Melissa and k.d. and the Indigo Girls: they offered music that told our stories carefully. Over the years, they have come out and our stories have become as blatant as the stories told in Women's music. The only difference is that fourteen-year-olds today don't have to hide in music stores, reading lyrics and wondering what the songs sound like. And live venues are open to me now. As well as the concerts of professionals, I've discovered the Denver Women's Chorus, who give volume to the music, swelling it with a hundred voices: each singing the songs of my life.

Music is still my lifeline to the lesbian community. Whether it's Amy Ray and Emily Salier or Ferron, I find myself reflected and celebrated. It was my hope in rural Kansas in the late 70s and it is my passion today. I owe my sanity and coming out to the possibility of Sweet Darlin' Women. They are still my Song of the Soul.



Susan Keleher

## Sculptural Movement

Sculptural movement weaves a story through the fabric of space pulling the eye along with it on an invisible thread. It occurs on parallel levels; in the process of creating the artwork, in the artwork itself, and in the artist. My sculpture teacher used to call sculpting gesture work and a gestour is a story teller who narrates gests or movements. This movement provides visual and tactile stimulation in static form.

Depicting movement in something solid such as clay or bronze seems a contradiction but just as sound and silence exist only in relation, space and substance activate each other. Sculpture is an idea abstracted from time. It is the essence of a time sequence but not the sequence itself or any single part of it. A literal reproduction of shape results in dead copy. The department stores are full of these.

Our eyes see two dimensionally. We can see surfaces but we do not literally see depth nor the significant inner life. This is learned from experience and intuition. We know the three dimensional form of sculpture mostly from our sense of touch and our own existence and movement in space. Movement is described primarily as a visual experience but touch can reveal many aspects as well. Just take a minute to close your eyes and put your hands to your face. Now feel its movement as you try several different expressions. The feeling of happiness has an upward movement as opposed to the downward movement of sadness. Try pretending you are sucking on a lemon, smelling a rose, or hearing a prowler outside your window. How does the movement of each of these feel? The distance between our eyes results in a sort of binocular vision and each presents a slightly different picture to the brain. In order to compensate for our two-dimensional vision our sculpting teacher used to have us revolve a short distance around the model in 10-15 minute intervals to gather composite views. We were like planets orbiting the sun, turning our work as we went. This movement allowed us to develop our work in equal stages of completeness. We were discouraged from working in great detail on one aspect of the sculpture at the expense of the rest, although I think this lopsided version would probably represent a more truthful commentary on the development of many of our lives.

This lesson was acknowledged and I move toward developing a well-rounded life; avoiding stagnation as well as extremes. I also strive to use my experience and intuition in an attempt at knowing the greater picture. On a spiritual level movement was magnified in a figure modeling class. The process involved sculpting in short sessions of 10-15 minutes to try and capture the gestour of the model. We would then smash it down to start another one. We did this throughout the semester. Our sessions grew longer in length but we were never allowed to save our work.

This reminds me of a story I read by Paula Ripple, F.P.A. in "Walking With Loneliness" about an artist who lived and worked on an obscure island. His most prized possession was a metal sculpture that he had fashioned through several years. In the process of molding and remolding it he recognized that, as an artist and as a man, he had grown with his own work. In his fondness for the work of his own hands he had the growing realization that this very work had led him to grow beyond what he had expressed through it, so he went in search of more metal out of which to form another sculpture, one that would be of even greater beauty. With disappointment he learned there was no more metal on that tiny island. If he wished to produce another work of art, he could only do so by melting and remolding his first masterpiece.

Beginnings and endings are part of life. "We cannot grow into some new place of life if we are unwilling to leave the place we are now." (Rosario Castellaos) Sometimes we are thrust into something new but often we seek it- *Dadme la muerte que me falta*-translated means give me the death I need.

The most moving experience for me in sculpting came early on in my very first class that was held at Art Park in Lewiston, New York. The setting was a barn with huge ceiling to floor doors at both ends of the building. These were flung open and the breeze and sunlight flooded in. The model was positioned on a platform similar to an oversized lazy susan so she could be turned while we remained stationary. In order to keep the clay from drying out every so often we would spray our piece with water. This initially made it very slippery and muddy. I was steadily working along, my fingers gliding over the glistening shoulders and back of my piece. It became time to turn the model another few degrees and there I stood, my vision in a direct line through my work to her eyes. She watched as my hands moved across the surface of the clay, a mirror of her body. She stared into my eyes and did not look

away. To this day I am unable to describe what transpired in the connection of that moment, only to feel how strongly I can be moved by another human being.

You are probably wondering, as I did at first, how an individual could pose for a room full of strangers exposing themselves and all of their perceived imperfections. I know I am projecting my own inhibitions because I really don't know what anyone thinks. You may say they are exhibitionists but then again so are flowers. I am grateful for both. Their beauty and their imperfections move me. In the sculpting process they become one and the same. Senses and understanding cease. Physical sight dissipates and it is through spirit that I undertake my work. You may also think that I myself am a voyeur. In a sense I am a voyeur but more precisely I am a 'voyeurager' on a journey of inquiry. Inquiry makes me a voyager. It gives me movement that takes me traveling far beyond my known self into unknown selves. Not only do I find myself creating artwork I find it creating me.

*I  
want  
to feel  
your  
movement  
beneath my fingers  
like a windchime  
tickled  
by the breeze,  
and to hear  
the gentle  
laughter  
of your voice.*

Kristan Aspen

## Oregon Women's Culture

1970 was the year I graduated from Oberlin College. I was 22 years old and I thought of myself as knowledgeable, sophisticated, educated, even worldly. The Vietnam War was raging, and protests against it were growing more militant. Student activists had been shot and killed that year on campuses at Mississippi State and Kent State (Ohio). It was only five years after the Civil Rights Act had been passed by Congress. I did not really know how pressures for change from both the Black Power Movement and the non-violent civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had made that historic legislation possible. It was just three years after the infamous "Summer of Love" in San Francisco, when hippies spontaneously gathered to dance and do just about everything else in the streets. 1970 was right in the middle of the great migration of young people from everywhere to the West Coast.

I did not know how the homophile movement for lesbian and gay rights had flourished quietly in the '50s with the Mattachine Society, and the publication of *The Ladder*, or how it had exploded into international consciousness the year before, in 1969, when the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village had launched the Gay Liberation Movement. I knew many women were not dressing to please men any more, but did not fully understand that women who had been ignited in 1963, by Betty Freidan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, were about to erupt into one of the most significant mass movements of the century in the USA, the second wave of feminism, called the Women's Liberation Movement. And I had no idea that I would be part of a radical blending of feminism and lesbian consciousness that would create a whole new Womyn's Culture.

Being optimistic that ALL women could and would want to participate in this exciting process, and perhaps being a little bit closeted about our newfound identity, we called it Womyn's Culture. Later, with the help of Alix Dobkin and other lesbian musicians and writers, some of us recognized the essential lesbian quality of much of what was produced, and began to use the "L" word more frequently. There were bitter wars between us, about exclusion of men, of heterosexual women, of lesbian separatists. We knew that what we were building was a threat to many both personally and politically, and we expected to disagree. But our big fear was that it was directed from outside our community, by government agents attempting to destroy our Womyn's Culture. In 1992 when I was beginning to write about the 1970s, we were just starting to experience the backlash of the extreme right wing. Now in 2005, we see how Christian Fundamentalism has

taken over the Republican party, and it becomes possible to understand the extent of the threat that our coloring outside the lines created.

As a musician who has been continuously involved in "Women's Music" since 1974, I am acutely aware of the cultural changes that preceded and followed the rise and decline of this genre. Although this was a national phenomenon, one of the primary centers of activity for lesbians in the 1970s was Portland, Oregon, my hometown.

In the world of pop music at that time, the topical song written about current events, was competing with romance as an acceptable subject. Folk music spilled over into the mainstream through artists like Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Joan Baez, and many others. The civil rights movement had put freedom songs from African American tradition into the public eye and ear. Even the new hard rock music reflected the activism of the day through groups like Country Joe McDonald and the Fish, Deadly Nightshade, Joy of Cooking, and a few other women artists already in the music industry, carved a niche in the "hip" music scene as young women looked for independent role models. However, within the music industry they received the same discrimination and sexist brush-off women had always been given. For instance, Bonnie Raitt was not allowed to play guitar on her own early records. This lack of respect and artistic control within the music industry, coupled with a growing national consciousness of our own voices and abilities, led women in music to look for alternatives.

One alternative was Rounder Records, a counter-culture, anti-profit collective dedicated to recording non-commercial traditional American music and protest music of the past and present. They produced the very first 33 1/3 lp record of music associated with the Women's Liberation Movement, a joint album featuring the New Haven and the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Bands. *Mountain Moving Day* was released in 1972. Its title song, written by Naomi Weisstein, added a second verse to Yosano Akiko's poem from 1911. Akiko was known as a free thinker, a bisexual woman, and a brilliant poet many decades earlier in Japan. This song established the theme of the decade, foreshadowing big changes...and it became the namesake for a radical café in Portland and a lesbian coffeehouse in Chicago.

*The mountain moving day is coming  
I say so yet others doubt it  
Only a while the mountain sleeps  
In the past all mountains moved in fire  
Yet you may not believe it  
O man, this alone believe  
All sleeping women will now awake and move*

The drive, determination, and focus of this music is remarkable in the context of a time when Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison's contempt for women dominated rock music. In this milieu women simply did not play electric instruments and if they sang with male rock bands they sang about the pain men caused them. Remember Janis Joplin? The Chicago and New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Bands charted a new course.

Like many women in this decade I was ready and willing to change or be changed (*The Changer and The Changed* was Cris Williamson's first album on the Olivia label. Much has been and will be written about Olivia's artists. It is my goal to document the Womyn's Culture in which I directly participated that will not be remembered unless we who were there write it down.) One of the shared assumptions of the decade was that women could do anything we set our minds to. We were eager to learn things from other women. It didn't matter if we were experts or not. If we knew more than someone else, we could teach what we knew. Some changes were in consciousness; others were in concrete skills we learned.

An example from my own life is how suddenly after graduating from college I realized I lacked some practical skills I might need to function independently in the world—like knowing how to fix my car. So, with my new sociology bachelor's degree, I enrolled in a vocational training school for high school dropouts, and became one of the early women auto mechanics in Portland. In 1974 I set up shop in the garage under my rented house, with another woman mechanic, Hawk Madrone. We were instantly busy! Besides fixing cars, I organized and taught auto mechanics classes in my living room, my garage, and at the First Unitarian Church in downtown Portland.

Consciousness raising took place in many ways, not just in small group conversations, but in the bars and coffeehouses. The first 45 rpm single with feminist consciousness and the word "lesbian" in it, was Maxine Feldman's *Angry Atthis*. It was produced in 1972 in Los Angeles with Naomi Littlebear and Robin Flower backing up Maxine. They performed as an opening act to Patu Harrison and Robin Tyler's nightclub comedy team. Harrison and Tyler were breaking the mold for standup comediennes who at that time wore full length ballgowns and were the butt of many sexist jokes (Remember George Burns and Gracie Allen?). Maxine's record was placed on jukeboxes in the Los Angeles women's bars right next to the Rolling Stones and Aretha Franklin.

I was introduced to Naomi Littlebear in Fall 1973. She was playing at the 9th Street Exit, a local coffeehouse, with Robin Flower, Mary Wings, and Barbara Bernstein. It was her last performance with the group and before I knew it Naomi and I had joined the migratory stream on the road traveling to California, Mexico, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah for a year. At the beginning of

our trip we became marooned for a month in Arcata, CA, because of a car accident. There we were helped by women starting a Rape Crisis Center and we went to a women's party where they played brand new music we had never heard before. Naomi remembers it as from a rock band on the East Coast—probably *Mountain Moving Day*.

When we returned to Oregon in December 1974, Naomi and I began performing as Aspen and Littlebear. Soon Naomi, who never relished being a solo (or duo) performer because she always heard more layers of sound, decided to form the Ursa Minor Choir, possibly the first "women's music" choir in the whole country. She wrote the music and conducted; I accompanied on the piano. We rehearsed and recorded cassette tapes in our kitchen. We performed at the Mountain Moving Cafe.

In 1975, the bicentennial year, we sang "Why Did You Come to America?" Naomi's plea for peace and equality among all Americans. That year our choir included a few men from the political arts/theatre community centered at the Café. A few years later one of these feminist fellows became a founder of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. The second year, as more energy was focused on lesbian separatism, we chose to be a women-only group. Many of the singers could not read music, but neither could Naomi. Nevertheless, she wrote all the choir parts and much of the accompaniment, teaching everything to us by repetition. As a classically trained, visually oriented musician, I found that working with Naomi challenged me to develop my listening and improvisation skills for the first time in my life.

Portland musicians and audiences were fortunate to have the Mountain Moving Cafe as a community center/performance space/restaurant. The mixed collective of men and women served brown rice and veggies, homemade bread, salads and vegetarian soups long before the term "natural food" was coined. And they were the first in town to offer truly spectacular and elaborate desserts like boccone dolce and New York style cheesecake. There were also wonderful artists performing there most nights of the week. On Wednesdays, designated as Women's Night, we struggled earnestly to dissuade men who were either curious or felt it was their right to come in despite our wish to bar them. Naomi and I performed there regularly as a duo, often with friends or the Ursa Minor Choir. So did a host of other local artists and a few traveling ones as well. The Cafe closed its doors sometime in 1976, just as The Izquierda Ensemble was born from the Ursa Minor Choir.

Izquierda (meaning "left" in Spanish) was chosen for our ensemble name as a reference to left brain activity, sinister, gauche, intuitive, non-linear creativity associated perhaps negatively with women. (Yes, I had Tee Corinne's *Sinister Wisdom* poster on my wall.) We chose to claim it as our own and used Spanish

as our connection to Naomi's Chicana heritage. Naomi was a self-taught singer/songwriter/musician who had been raised in the San Fernando Valley, exposed to Orange County in high school, and became a flower child in the late '60s and early '70s, floating between Los Angeles and Portland, performing and living with hippie families until she figured out she wanted to play music and be with women. Izetta Smith, Kate Campeau, Robin Chilstrom, and June Adams all sang and toured with Naomi and me in Izquierda. After we played at the 2nd Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and the 4th National Women's Music Festival in 1977, we knew that we could have a career performing for audiences of women almost anywhere we chose to go.

Overnight I became the tour booker, learning quickly how to contact producers, set up dates that would take us on a nationwide swing, and negotiate a fee that would both sustain us during the tour and give us a little left over when we got home. We traveled all together in one van, carrying all our instruments, sound equipment, costumes, and other necessities, for 2-3 months at a time, circling the country and building our community everywhere we went. My skills as an auto mechanic allowed us to travel without fear of being stranded.

I have only one memorable breakdown story from all our years on the road. It was on the trip we made with a caravan of vehicles to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in SisterElk, our '57 Chevy panel truck. On a Saturday afternoon in the pouring rain in Kellogg, Idaho, our entourage caused quite a stir as I removed a broken rear axle, drove to the nearest wrecking yard to purchase a replacement, and returned to install it in the middle of Main Street with the whole town watching and the newspaper reporter taking pictures of the short-haired, self-sufficient "women's libbers."

The advantage of touring was that we didn't have to come up with a completely new program every three to six months. Naomi was very particular about presenting new material every time we played. On tour we could play the same songs and they would be new to our new audience. Touring also meant we could record and sell albums of our music to help finance our trips. We developed an audition packet with press materials and publicity photos taken by Donna Pollach, who had already been documenting our community both formally and informally from the beginning of the decade. Most of the publicity photographs Izquierda used on our album and for posters were taken by Donna.

Soon we discovered that some women in our audiences already knew our songs. They had heard us at the festivals or purchased our record from a women's bookstore or *Ladyslipper Music*, a national distributor of women's music based in North Carolina. We definitely developed a following, becoming especially well known for two songs, both written by Naomi Littlebear Morena, "Sisters Take Care of Sisters" and "Like a Mountain." These songs were sung by other



artists and in particular, women's choirs, in many states and eventually around the world.

It was very lovely and even flattering at first, to think of our music being so powerful that it had imbedded itself in women's hearts and become their expression of who they were, as it had originally been Naomi's vision of a wave of women rising up to take control of our own lives. But within less than ten years we saw her song, "Like a Mountain" quoted in print by Reader's Digest and by women at the Greenham Commons women's peace camp in England without reference to a composer at all. Then, when the Syracuse Cultural Workers (who used arts to focus on the need for social change) began to sell a calendar entitled "Can't Kill the Spirit" directly quoting the entire song, without contacting her for permission or offering any royalty payment, we were all appalled. Eventually Naomi worked out an agreement with them. She also traveled to the UK to visit the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, and then recorded "Like a Mountain" with the London Women's Choir.

Even today, you can search the Internet for "Can't Kill the Spirit" and find artists and writers quoting, singing, and recording her song as if it were an anonymous American spiritual, which is what the Greenham women had thought it was. How quickly our herstory fades... How important it is to write it down!

The Izquierda Ensemble toured nationally for four years. Our *Quiet Thunder* album came out in 1979, very close to the end of the era of lp records. It was recorded at Recording Associates in Portland, engineered by Joan Lowe, who had worked on early Olivia projects and was semi-retired by this time and living in Oregon. One of our favorite songs which didn't end up on the album because we couldn't get a good enough "take" of it in the studio, was "Rising Tide" by an African American musician from Washington, D.C., Theresa Clark. We met Theresa at the National Women's Music Festival, when she performed with her band Hysteria. Later she moved to Seattle, studied jazz at the Cornish Institute, and then completed her internships in family medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine. She now works as a community clinic doctor in Seattle.

Several of the members of Izquierda still live in Portland. Naomi is now a writer and a parole and probation officer for Washington County Corrections. She occasionally still sings with Izetta, and is very much in demand as a grief counselor and facilitates a support group for lesbians struggling with cancer. Robin Chilstrom has her own CD which showcases the voice technique for improvisation which she has developed and teaches. She uses theatre arts to teach respect for the earth in schools. In the 1980s I returned to my roots in classical music to perform with my partner Janna MacAuslan as the Musica

Femina Flute Guitar Duo. We recorded two CDs and toured nationally for 12 years. Currently Musica Femina performs locally and we have formed Trio Pan Dulce with Janice Gould, a published poet and linguist, to explore Latin American folk, flamenco, tangos, and French café music. I also work part-time as Development Director for Bradley-Angle House, which was founded 30 years ago by lesbians I knew.

While some political women were busy redesigning institutions and producing events to educate and raise consciousness in cities, others decided that rural living would provide better opportunities to create radically new social structures and institutions free from patriarchy. Music has always been an integral part of the rural land life. Living closer to the earth, women were able to find their natural rhythms and attune themselves to the phases of the moon, as they explored earth-centered and WICCAN spirituality. Singing and drumming were common activities for any gathering of country women celebrating full moons, solstices or equinoxes.

Southern Oregon women wrote songs whenever they needed them. Songs provided courage, inspiration, hope, pleasure, and were a way to honor each other on birthdays and at other special times. Very quickly many songs became part of the oral tradition we call Circle Songs. These songs were mostly unpublished and may never even have been written down, but we sang them together and carried them with us to other circles. Still actively sung today, they form a large collective opus that directly links us to our past. Because of the oral tradition the composer's name has often been forgotten. As some women began to record and sell this music, questions of copyright emerged and we still do not always agree on the origin of a song.

One rural Oregon singer/songwriter who did publish her songs was Ruth Mountaingrove, whose *Turned On Woman Songbook* included songs written between 1970 and 1975. Ruth is also a photographer who documented many country women's projects from Southern Oregon. She and her partner for many years, Jean, took the same last name, Mountaingrove, after they met and fell in love in Oregon. They were instrumental in gathering women to celebrate our spirituality, organizing a WomanSpirit Festival in 1975. From that gathering *WomanSpirit Magazine* was born. This publication served as a forum for exploration of earth and woman-centered spirituality as practiced by women all around the world. It was distributed nationally throughout the decade and into the 1980s. Many women contributed to the magazine over the years, with different groups coming together to produce each issue. Portland photographer, Donna Pollach, who was known for her stunning portraits, contributed a number of photographs, one of which was a self-portrait used on a cover in 1976. Donna died of breast cancer in 2002.

The Dyketones were a spoof—a piece of entertainment put together for a lesbian New Year's Eve party in 1979. Beyond anyone's wildest imagination, we were an instant hit! Embracing the restrictive male and female roles of 1950s and '60s, the Dyketones poked fun at ourselves and our lesbian foremothers, through characters, costumes, skits, and altered lyrics to well-known pop songs. This was the "oppressive music" of our early years, and we performed it with gusto, but always with tongue in cheek. Most of us played several characters. I was Betty Anglo and Lesberace. Naomi was Chevy Chavez. The group was considered purely local until Char Priolo (a.k.a. Chucky Linguini), decided to take it on the road to Provincetown, MA. But that's really a story for the 1980s. Original Dyketones members included Naomi Littlebear Morena, Sierra Lonepine Briano, Maia MacNamara, Char Priolo, Niobeh Tsaba (now Silas Crowfoot), Linda Besant, Katharine English, and Kristan Aspen. The Fabulous Dyketones over the years also included Portlanders Mary Rose, Judith Rizzio, Barb Galloway, San Gordon, and Margo Tufo, among many others.

In the 1970s, when hundreds of women decided they didn't have to make the coffee for every meeting they attended; when thousands of women determined to speak up in the face of sexist remarks, innuendos, and jokes, when tens of thousands of women began to live the lives they wanted to live, no one in our society was unchanged.

Music was both a glue that held us together and a fuel for the fire that transformed us. The life-changing effect of this decade cannot be denied. A community was formed then and has since spread out across the globe. In the summer of 1997, after the success of the Baba Yaga reunion, I organized a reunion for the Mt. Moving Cafe. More than 300 women and men came from as far away as Amsterdam, Maine, New York, southern and northern California, and all over the Pacific Northwest.

We spoke about what we had created in the '70s, and saw how much of it is still with us today. We spoke of what we want to carry into the 21st century for our communities, our families, ourselves. Our accomplishments are much like the anthem Izquierda was most famous for, "Like a Mountain,"

*Can't kill the spirit  
It's like a mountain  
Old and strong  
It goes on and on*

...which brings us back to the mountain theme that began this decade of womyn's music. This song has truly taken on a life of its own. And like a mountain, the Womyn's Culture we created in the 1970s has provided a firm foundation for many who followed us to reach beyond our dreams toward equality, respect, and equal access for women in all areas of our lives.

Jean Sirius

## An Inadvertent Artist

I came to photography late and reluctantly. Not kicking and screaming, exactly, but as yet another telling of the great cosmic joke.

As an adolescent, I could not be troubled to admire a sunset. Twenty years later, I raked Yosemite with my eyes, and asked directions to the gift shop. In between, for a couple of years I was the girl on the motorcycle *behind* the photographer, shouldering a backpack full of heavy and sharp. Photography was a burden I gratefully surrendered, along with the photographer, at my first opportunity.

Writing was what I did; it defined me. My nightmare was that I would fall in love and settle down, and in my contentment lose my writing. As in any properly-constructed cautionary tale, that is exactly what happened. I wrote long enough to finish *Lesbian Love Poems* <<http://www.jeansirius.com/lesbian.html>>, and then that passionate and unstoppable spate of words, which had shaped my life for two decades, dried up.

Ten years later, two significant events: I returned to college, and my lover's cancer was diagnosed. To choose my first classes, I asked myself what I was afraid of. I was afraid of being asked to draw something, so I signed up for an art class, where I learned to do collage. I made collage for the next eight years, most intensely during the last year of Cara's life. In 2001 I published *Seeing Double/Rose Windows* <<http://www.jeansirius.com/seeingdouble.html> and <http://www.jeansirius.com/rosewindows.html>>, a collection of those pieces, but since her death in 1997 I have made no more.

Grief changes everything. Whatever had been true about me was open to question. With my heart broken and my insides ripped out, I saw the world with as little prejudice as an infant. Floating in uncertainty, I was willing to be attracted rather than to steer. Images composed themselves before my eyes. They were remarkable, extraordinary, and no one was seeing them but me. It seemed somehow wasteful.

Soon thereafter, I picked up a digital camera. Those found compositions reinforced my pronopia, the suspicion that the universe is a benevolent conspiracy. How else to explain the exquisite juxtapositions, the delicate balances, the extravagant asymmetries?

After two years of making portraits of leaves <<http://homepage.mac.com/jeansirius/PhotoAlbum3.html>>, I finally heard what they were showing me, saw what they were saying. They were all so different: tiny, wet, furred, poison-green; old, dry, brown, broken; huge, yellow, sunstruck; red and translucent.

And they were all alike in this: each one was perfect, numinous, touched with divinity, whatever its age or color or size or state of deterioration.

And also: self portraits, faces and body parts, to discover who I might be, now that I couldn't define myself in relation to Cara. From lurid shots of how I looked with purple hair to an exploration of Europe by way of my feet <<http://www.jeansirius.com/feet.html> and <http://www.jeansirius.com/reflect.html>>, I worked to locate myself in space and time, on planet earth, among the breathing.

This is how I returned to photography. After words failed me, images came to my rescue with numinosity and pronoia: the other aspects of the great cosmic joke.



Jean Sirius- "Car, Leaf" ©2002

Jean Taylor

## Lesbian Performances Downunder

The first time I saw a lesbian play, *Shift* by Di King, it was performed by the Women's Theatre Group in the Back Theatre of the Pram Factory in Melbourne in November 1975. One scene I remember clearly: as part of the script one of the actors took her T-shirt off so that another actor could massage her shoulders as they continued talking. A bare-breasted womyn on stage! You could have heard a pin-drop.

After the WTG folded in 1977, some of the womyn went on to establish the Wimmin's Circus where womyn stood on each other's shoulders, walked on stilts, did acrobatics, played music and were generally so skilled and entertaining it was a joy to watch something the like of which I'd never seen before.

Back then, in my early thirties I'd have no more thought of going on stage than flying to the moon. It took another ten years before I started writing plays and then initiated the Purple Parrots, a lesbian feminist performing group, to perform three of my short lesbian comedies, including *The Bar-Dyke* and *The Feminist*, that premiered at the Kingston Hotel (the Women's Pub) in May 1986. The Purple Parrots continued to workshop and perform till it folded at the end of 1987.

Towards the end of 1989, I was a founding member of Amazon Theatre another lesbian performing group. We performed our first play, *Spot the Dyke*, as part of the first Lesbian Festival in Melbourne in January 1990. At Amazon Theatre we devised, work-shopped and co-wrote all our own scripts according to how many of us wanted to perform and did four plays altogether until 1995. For our second play, *Dykes of Our Restless Daze*, performed in the Pit at Footscray Community Arts Centre (FCAC) for the Lesbian Festival in Melbourne in January 1991, I wrote a scene where I had to take my T-shirt off so that another performer could massage my shoulders. This time I was the bare-breasted womyn on stage. Again, you could have heard a pin drop!

Also in 1991 I was a founding member of the Women's Circus, also based at FCAC. Throughout that first year as I learnt to do double and group balances, to stand on my head and do forward rolls, to juggle and walk on stilts I could hardly believe, at the age of 47, I was actually learning to do these and other equally, for me, extraordinary skills. Except every week I had the aching muscles to prove it.

I performed on stilts, in balances, with fire, throwing diablo, spinning plates and in all manner of scenarios and costumes for the first five performances and

many dozens of smaller gigs with the Women Circus till 1996 (the highlight was performing at the Women's Forum in Beijing in 1995) and had an absolutely fantastic time. So much so, in fact, that I co-edited the book *Women's Circus: Leaping off the Edge*, published by Spinifex Press in 1997. And have kept in touch by doing a bit of front of house for the annual shows at the end of each year ever since.

I'd always particularly admired one-womyn shows and by 1992 figured I had enough skill and experience to do one of my own, *Matri Spacial Descent*, featuring stories about myself and three other female members of my immediate family. It premiered in Melbourne during the Lesbian Festival in October 1992 and toured to the National 10/40 Conference (for feminists over 40 years of age) in Alice Springs (April 1993), and the Lesbian Festivals in Perth (October 1993) and Brisbane (July 1994).

Out of my experiences with the Women's Circus I initiated a six-week series of workshops in January 1995 for womyn over 40 to learn basic circus skills. The way these womyn in their 40s 50s and 60s took to climbing ropes, swinging from trapezes, clowning, standing on shoulders, doing thigh stands, walking on stilts, making music and everything else far exceeded my expectations. After I'd directed the first performance, *Act Your Age*, for International Women's Day that year, we all agreed that the Performing Older Women's Circus (POW) would continue. Being involved in POW Circus was one of the best things I've ever done. I was the Director for the next three shows and took time out at the end of 1997. Others, I'm pleased to report, have kept POW going ever since.

Nowadays it seems that apart from the odd reading of my written work I'm no longer so interested in being on stage. My creative outlets are much less energetic. I took up painting again in 1994 and after entering my second painting in the first Lesbian Art Works exhibition at the Brunswick Mechanics Institute in June 1996, I have enjoyed seeing my paintings, knitted works and painted chairs in various lesbian, womyn's and gay exhibitions over these past several years.

One of the joys of being a lesbian has always been the creativity and artistic expression in our community. Not only have there been many lesbian plays, dances, circus performances and art exhibitions to go to, there has also been the opportunity for those of us who wanted to participate to be playwrights, circus performers, artists, actors, musicians and whatever else took our fancy.

The variety of these creative outlets, the courage of our artists to get up and have a go and the encouragement of a supportive community enables our lives as lesbians to be enriched and fulfilled in so many satisfying ways I'm convinced it's what has kept many of us going all these years.

Bethroot Gwynn

## Theaterwoman

Look!

*Incandescent feathers of neon rainbow to wear*

*My headdress is shimmering*

*These extravagant clouds fit my body just right*

*And I am a galaxy dancing.*

Come!

*The women are gathering*

*Come! into the temple, onto the stage*

*It's easy*

*I have the perfect sunrays for you to wear, right out of the  
costume trunk*

*Yes! I will light your way*

*and Yes! You just spoke jewels!*

I had never planned to become a theaterwoman. Well, except for my secret fantasies at age 14: I rehearsed over and over my acceptance speech for the Best Actress Oscar, giving devotion and all credit to James Dean, the movie actor killed in an auto crash on my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was not a lesbian at the time, though I was idolizing an icon of rebellion. I never pursued the fantasy, never took drama classes or hung out with the college acting crowd. I was doing social activism and religious studies, which led me eventually to radical feminism and radical commitment to women.

In the early 1970s, I was part of a thriving lesbian counter-culture. My friends and I were beginning to discover/imagine feminist spirituality. I was reading everything I could find about goddess-worshipping cultures. We were high on the word "Magic" (among other things); we were experimenting with ritual, deepening with the natural world. Singing was becoming our language of ceremony: songs of the moment, of the heart. Something was stirring in me about priestess-work, whatever that might be. I was enthralled by the wearable art exhibit, and the tribal collection, at the Art Museum. I crafted some masks and ceremonial rattles. Enactment, the ancient connection between ritual and theater, was tugging at the edges of my awareness.

Reeling from my mother's untimely death, I dipped into madness. My theaterwoman arrived full-blown while I was wiggled out, though I did not comprehend her then. Characters, dialect: I was talking a mile a minute, making faces in the mirror. I was my grandmother, my uncle, my childhood



babysitter, my mother. I was held fast, throughout the whirlwind that took over my mind, by lesbian circle sisters who came into the loony bin, sat beside me, passed a rattle, sang and sang the songs that shaped our sweet rituals. Eventually – I'm told – I shook the rattle a long time, and finally sang. The spirit-language of our music resonated even behind the thick curtain of madness. In this terrifying healing crisis 29 years ago, I was re-enacting my mother's agonies (hospitalization, physical torment). Somehow my struggle with psychosis waged such a big drama on my personal stage that I moved my mother, her death, my grief out of the limelight. I took center focus again.

Sane now, I settled into country life on lesbian land, a hilltop place my land partner and I named Fly Away Home, perfectly sited for ritual gatherings with a big round house, an amphitheater-shaped garden, space to drum and shout and cry. As the counter-culture swirled, and as the Muse would have it, a few theaterwomen wound up at our circles. One of them said to me, "These songs, these voices, characters that come out of you in circle – you need to be on stage!" Another theaterwoman became my soul sister, my lover for a time, my feisty muse-in-the-flesh. She asked me to write a play about herself and me for her birthday. It was my first script. I drew from her letters to me:

"Do you want to write a play? And I can help you? . . . Planning and writing and I can make sure it's a play and you can come up with ideas and write them. . . Serious work play – Magic Maker – soul in my soul you are. Like I found you in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and we went off together immediately with so much to do and say and quickly had costumes and sets and did our plays for our family – quickly had whole other plays when the first ones were done. Did you wanna see another one?"

And from my letters to her: *"Canny woman. However do you know so much of me? My hidden recesses are laid open, my secret treasure boxes turn up. . . See how wealthy I am, see all the trunksful of talent, all carefully packed away; waiting for some finally appropriate occasion, some year in old age for finally memoirs or letter collections – see how much I've saved up: with no belief at all that the musty boxes will ever get opened except for rummaging. You do see, you saw before I saw. You have found the crumpled up brown paper bag of my creativities, you take it from the closet before my death, you hand it to me saying 'Here, do something with this, and I will help.'"*<sup>2</sup>

So I did something; moved to the city for most of a year; studied physical theater, advanced improvisation, mime; did a minor moment in a stage show. The improvisation classes asked us to unearth our own experi-

ences for material, and in the spirit of surprise, to create and perform personal story. I was unpacking my talents — movement grounded in Tai Chi training, singing nurtured in a Southern Methodist childhood, rhythm of word and metaphor. This was not acting the part of someone else; this was focused sharing of my true, free-wheeling self.

I returned to the land and to a part-time career of performing and teaching Personal Theater for Women. My muse sister was living on the land by then; she and the other two women in my lesbian family of the early 1980s co-created theater magic with me. Our first workshop brought 12 women together, many of them theater folk. We invented a powerful workshop form, full of laughter, self-discovery, transformation. After theater games stretch and loosen us beyond usual, each woman creates a character from her own inner pantheon. We plunge into the costume trunk, and then spend an evening together, completely in character. During that first workshop event, each of us chose to come as her own mother. We were 24 women by the end of that weekend: 12 daughters, 12 mothers. Unraveling the experience takes a full next day, attending to each other's stories, teasing out the lessons that inhabit us now. Unraveling the experience can take a full lifetime. I recently ran into a lesbian who came to one of our theater workshops 20 some years ago. I asked, "Do you remember who you came as?" "Oh yes," she said, "I'll never forget. I was just beginning to come out. I wore swirls of blue. I was quiet. But I was OUT to myself. It was my first step." Several dozen women have come, over the years, to play these serious theater games.

*"They're magic, these women, they're witches, some say  
and if you should go there they might make a play  
full of fairies and costumes and singing and masks  
full of candles and laughter and lanterns — just ask  
them to call you, then enter the gate  
you can enter their land, no matter how late  
the night wings will lift you on feather and bone  
to Fly Away Fly Away Fly Away Home."<sup>3</sup>*

We did make a play, my first full-length script, performed by the four of us in 1981-82. "Feathers in My Mind: a very tale — about a mother, a daughter, a death, and a lesbian family." The very tale was my own, personal mythology with my friends gussied up to be this inner voice or that one. There was my mother, her very words excerpted from her letters (some of them found crumpled in a brown paper bag). There was her death, and a rendition of my loony bin trauma. There was, most colorfully, a celebration of the les-

bian family we were creating – the music of us, the poetry of deep bonding among women. Women in our audiences were hungry for truth-speaking, for real stories of life, death, madness, love told from the lesbian heart.

Fairy dust notwithstanding, my lesbian family and my performing ensemble changed shape. We performed some dazzling pieces in duo, trio combinations, but for the most part, I was becoming a solo performer, gifted with technical and critical support from my initial land partner. I performed at women's festivals and spiritual events, often incarnating/invoking goddess power. It gave me special pleasure, in the performance "A Mind Play," to hurl around the stage the pages of my Masters thesis, a piece of theological nonsense full of Father God language. A background in religious scholarship served me well, however, when I was asked to create a piece about the right to abortion. I knew how to find and pontificate the most misogynist church teachings. This abortion piece, "Immaculate Decision," is the only one of my theater productions that is not rooted in my personal experience. I do speak as a lesbian at the end, acknowledging every woman's vulnerability to sexual predation and unwanted pregnancy. I understand, now 18 years later, that my coming out on stage created a furor inside local NARAL, the sponsor for this show's debut.

I taught Personal Theater for Women Workshops in many cities and a few states, inviting women to play with voice, movement, memory, the Now. I was teaching "*Theater As Medicine – a playful/profound dose of self-exploration and healing. Every woman's story is material for theatrical expression, and new layers of meaning and experience unfold when women are offered a safe space and techniques for [working with] their stories.*"<sup>30</sup> The focus was not on performance – until some of my students began to have appetite for a wider sharing.

Five of my students, lesbians from different parts of the region, took up my offer to coach them toward a performance piece. We worked for a year, churning up issues from childhood, exploring critical life-events, distilling experiences into physical image and symbolic expression. The result was a Personal Theater performance in 1987-88 called "Pieces of Truth," with a subtitle quote from Muriel Rukeyser: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would crack open." I directed another group of 5 lesbians in a 1991 performance, "Childtracks and Amazon Wings." In both these productions, lesbians shared their stories on stage with openness, courage, humor, intensity. They wrestled with material about family violence, self-esteem, judgmental mothers, childhood incest, vocational quandary, lesbian motherhood. They attended each other with loving appreciation.

Both productions were performed for women-only audiences – virtu-

ally unheard of these days – as a measure of respect for the vulnerability of non-professional “actors” sharing charged and tender personal content. Women-only space also provided a safe context for audience members, whose own tender stories welled up as they watched and listened, drawn together in a community of witnesses. *“Theater as Ritual: an opportunity for those who witness dramatic self-exposure to find their own truths being reflected, their own secrets cracking open, their own spirits stirred.”*<sup>5</sup> The power of transformation was palpable, onstage and off. Several lesbians who saw “Childtracks” took a course with me, and then continued doing Personal Theater sessions on their own for several years, creating a community of support for expressive work/play.

I asked my theaterwoman self to wait in the wings for some years while I built a new round house at Fly Away Home, more perfectly designed for rehearsal, performance, ceremony. I re-emerged as performer on my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday with an audience of women friends; I tapped into memoir, creating special magic with personal relics and costumery. I wore my mother’s wedding dress as a cape, attached tiny doll clothes and baby clothes from my childhood to a billowing hoop skirt I once wore as a teenager. In a final costume tableau, I invoked the women of the world, wearing womanly treasures that had come my way from Kenya, China, Kuwait, South Asia. We were reeling from the shock of September 11, 2001, just 2 weeks prior. I sang/we sang, “The Earth Is A Woman and She Will Rise.”<sup>6</sup> In that moment, I was channeling participatory hope. In a time of collective despair, I became a visual promise of global possibility, and my community was gratefully moved. *“Theater as Prayer: a formal experience of risking spirit, evoking transformative power. I invoke the spirit of Everywoman, reaching deep into memory and imagination to honor that which is Holy and Female – a ceremony of empowerment for myself and my audience.”*<sup>7</sup>

My most recent theater piece is “Women: The Longest Revolution. A Performance Documentary” (2003-04). What has changed for women in the past 35 years, what have we accomplished, what have we yet to do? I wrote and performed the piece in collaboration with two other lesbians; it weaves together facts, personal stories, poems, humor, songs – with regional, national, global scope. There are cameo performances by seven other lesbians who share personal tales, adding some diversities of age, ethnicity, job history, women’s movement experience. The cameos shimmer with a fresh, barely rehearsed quality especially delightful to audiences. Each women’s community where we performed got a lively dose of lesbian history with some cameo stories specific to that city’s women’s movement heyday. “I never

knew there was a women's trucking collective here!" These productions were done as benefits for local women's projects: a safe house, a lesbian history archive, a women's bookstore, a lesbian community organization. "Women: The Longest Revolution" has a future in videotape form, and as a women's history production.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from my unpublished poem, "Self Portrait in the Language of a Dream: Performer", 1990.

<sup>2</sup> From "A Birthday Play", unpublished script, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Carlisle, unpublished poem, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpted from my piece in *We'Moon '89*.

<sup>5</sup> From *We'Moon '89*.

<sup>6</sup> Sung by Libana Women's Chorus.

<sup>7</sup> From *We'Moon '89*.



Photo by Hawk Madrone / Camera femina

Bethroot Gwynn in "Immaculate Decision."

Jamie Anderson

## Women's Music Saved My Life

I owe it all to Therese Edell.

In 1977 my ex, Lois, who had remained my friend after our break-up (so very lesbian of us), called and asked if I wanted to attend a concert. "Who is it?" I asked. "Therese Edell," she responded. Who the heck was that? I had Carole King and James Taylor LPs in constant rotation on my stereo. At the lesbian bar I danced to our beloved local group Indavana Blues Band doing Donna Summer covers (including a very sexy "Love to Love You Baby" and girl howdy did I want to). That was my world—straight sensitive singer-songwriters and disco hit covers by a cute lesbian band. I reluctantly agreed to go, probably because there was nothing on TV that night and I could go to the bar afterwards.

Phoenix Community College auditorium was crowded with Earth-shoe-clad lesbians. Plaid flannel shirts from Goodwill were popular too. They looked a bit crunchier than the bar crowd but they were definitely lesbians so that made me feel at home.

The house lights dimmed as the audience hushed. After a short introduction a dark haired beautiful butch strolled out on stage, carrying a large Guild guitar. She wore a silky white shirt that I longed to touch, jeans and brown Frye boots. In a gorgeous alto voice she made us laugh with her own "Mama Let Your Children Go" and covered Alix Dobkin's "A Woman's Love." I was enthralled.

Leaving the concert Lois turned to me and commented, "What was great about that show is that she was singing about our lives." That was it exactly. I'd never heard a woman sing a love song to another woman. I'd never heard anyone speak so frankly from a public stage about being gay. I'd only been out a year and at the tender age of 19 I hadn't experienced much in life. Now I had a role model.

At the local women's bookstore I stopped turning up my nose at its little rack of LPs and began buying them with the meager income I earned doing clerical work. I purchased every album as it came in. Wearing headphones, I could hear every breath the singers took. I put myself in the studio with them, feeling the heartbeat of every song. I danced wildly to Linda Tillery and swooned over Meg Christian.

My own guitar playing had been dormant until I went to that concert. After that I couldn't wait to rush home and place my hands on the strings,

lovingly creating a C chord and rediscovering how comforting the vibrations were as I hugged the instrument to my chest. It wasn't long before I was turning Lois' poetry into songs and performing them at the local women's coffeehouse. It was a supportive atmosphere where guitarists and poets performed, always to hearty applause. When the Women's Center, who put on the event, decided to do a fundraising concert, I wanted to be a part of it. The organizer told me, with a trace of regret, that I could only do five songs (since there were other performers on the bill). Perfect. I'd only written five songs. Nervous to play in my first large concert, on that very stage where I'd seen Therese, I had no idea how to work with microphones until the kind sound guy showed me how. My big number that night was "Albino Roach Blues," a not-so-true story about a large bug in my house. Hearing the audience roar with laughter at the song's big punch line, I was hooked.

Bolstered by that performance, I began playing in other venues—local gay bars, open mikes and in other shows for the Women's Center. After collaborating with another poet on more songs, something broke through for me and I started writing my own lyrics as well as the melodies. I studied every detail of Robin Flower's flat picking, determined to learn her intricate style. I didn't quite get there but I did learn some of her songs, as well as Edell's "Let Your Children Go" and Dobkin's "A Woman's Love." I was especially excited about learning funny songs because hearing an audience laugh was better than sex. My first self-written comedy tune (aside from the co-written song about the roach) was "Heart Resort," about the aftermath of a break up where I'm dreaming of a little getaway for my heart where it can relax in a lounge chair and write in its journal.

After a move to Tucson, I continued writing and performing. I was also holding down a full schedule of classes at the University of Arizona and working a part-time office job. There was always time for music. It filled my soul like nothing else, giving me courage to continue on. When I started giving interviews a few years later writers would often ask why I choose to do out-lesbian songs. How could I not do them? It was women's music and its audience that nourished me.

My first recording was done with money given to me by a compassionate woman who'd heard me play the open mike at a women's music festival. It was done as cheaply as possible in the small room of a near-by studio. My friends played for free. The drums sounded like they were recorded in another room, the vocals were rough and some of the songs weakly written, but it was a beginning. It gave me legitimacy as a musician, and something to sell at my shows.

In 1987 my buddy Martie and I decided we wanted to go to the Michigan Women's Music Festival. Neither one of us had much in the way of dough and living in Arizona made travel expenses high. We came upon the brilliant idea to tour our way there. No matter that we'd never played outside our home state, we confidently hired a booking agent and sat back to await the influx of gigs that was sure to come. Six weeks before we were to leave our agent called and said she had nothing for us and quit. Saddened but still determined to go—hey, I wasn't going to pass up seeing Meg Christian in person simply because some agent didn't do her job—Martie said, "Let's pretend we're booking agents!" We scraped together a list of likely contacts and started making phone calls. We landed a half a dozen gigs in that short time. The women's music circuit had paid off and voila! We were touring musicians.

Traveling in Martie's van, the brakes only working when we stomped on them, we motored successfully across the country. Turnout was small and a bit sedate in Albuquerque, large and attentive in a Y basement in Kansas City, and boisterous at a small bar near St. Louis. We earned enough for gas and other expenses, even covering our festival tickets. I eagerly heard the many performers there and I think we played open mike.

We did it again in 1988, this time ending up at the National Women's Music Festival in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Around that time I met Dakota. After a couple months of serious dating she offered to support me while I got started with doing music full time. Coming from a working class family, I laughed that off. To me, work was going to a factory or office every day, it certainly wasn't dragging your butt all over the country playing folk music for lesbians. C'mon. After a few persuasive conversations, though, and hearing "You don't want to wake up when you're 70 and wish you'd tried this," I decided to try it.

Several more albums were made as I toured the country in a used Nissan pick-up, then a new Toyota. I was booked at my first women's music festival in 1990—you mean I can get PAID to be at a festival? I shared a room with Alix Dobkin. I could barely breathe around her. It's also where I met Sue Fink and other gracious performers, many who gave me great advice and invited me on stage to perform with them.

All this time, women's music was the soundtrack to my life. In my extensive treks all over the country, there was always Teresa Trull or Deidre McCalla on my tape deck. Their music sustained me through the long miles, encouraging me to keep writing and performing. The audiences certainly did that too, as did the people who organized the shows and the myriad of



women's media. This incredible network gave me courage to get in the truck and make that two or six hour haul to the next gig. There were times when I forgot about homophobia, sexism and all that nasty stuff. When you're in a room of cheering dykes why dwell on the negative?

Of course, it was tough sometimes like when I was kicked off a stage in Roanoke, VA. (Maybe playing for mostly straight folks in a church basement was a Bad Idea.) Or the time I shared housing with a temperamental pig. Or the boring hours and hours of driving. (If I ever stop touring I'd be a damn good truck driver — I can drive for long distances, can easily spot cops and like country music.)

I've talked with Therese Edell a few times. It's always a thrill. I always have a friendly chat with Deidre and Sue when I see them. A couple of years ago Holly Near invited me on stage to sing with her. Holly Near! Also singing were Teresa Trull, Cris Williamson, June Millington and John Bucchino. Okay, I can die now.

I continue to tour although not as much these days. After 18 years of touring I'm happy to stay home most of the time, teaching guitar and bellydance, writing, and walking my dog. I still venture out for week-long forays into the wilds of America because I need to feel a part of our lesbian nation. I'm sad that fewer women of my age and older don't come to shows like they used to but pleased that younger dykes are coming out in droves to hear great performers like Ember Swift, Alix Olson and others.

I was always too femme for Frye boots but I've owned a couple of silky white shirts and written a few songs. I still put on Meg's music sometimes and sing all the harmony parts; I'll be going to the Michigan Women's Music Festival as long as I have a vehicle with good brakes. May this courageous soundtrack of women performers keep playing for me and for all of us.

Kathleen Allen

## Somewhere Deep Within

I used to be a poet. A Damn good one. And I used to be a writer, a somewhat good one. But in a fit of rage and depression, I destroyed everything. Countless singing and moaning poems, umpteen searching and discovering essays were reduced to confetti. I wanted to feel free from writing; instead, I've never felt so imprisoned in my life.

Words come to me in the dead of the night, and they would sneak under my cell door, gather around my socked feet, and pull on the hem of my pajamas: all of them clamoring for attention. Verbs used to drive me mad because they would not stand still long enough for me to grasp their cries for attention. But the worst were the collective nouns. Oh, how they used to gang up on me. They would gather in the corner by my stack of books and put their arms around each other's shoulders in a huddle. When I heard "break!" and the huddle disbanded, I did fear them. The adjectives were my favorite and they knew it. They were the ones in the \$900 Italian suits of hand-woven linen, blazing white shirts brutally starched, each crease like a barber's straight razor.

Words were my sword, my vodka, my romp between the sheets. And they could strike terror in a congregation or heal a petrified child crouched in a closet. My sentences carried my ideologies and sang my romantic manifestoes. My paragraphs could woo you or destroy you. Words were the railroad tracks out of my cell, out of prison. But I got derailed.

Wait, there's more.

I don't remember exactly when, a convenience I have incorporated into painful life lessons, but it must have been just prior to September 2003. My unit was locked down, again. Someone on the other corridor was cutting up with a can top and I thought great, there goes our cooking privileges, and I started to try to figure out what I was going to do with thirteen cans of ravioli stockpiled in my locker.

To pass time, I dug a catalog out from under my mattress, which also houses everything that will not fit under or around my bed. I started thumbing through it, half-listening to the commotion of fourteen officers responding to the unit officer's call for assistance on his walkie-talkie when I saw it. I saw what could replace words: a harmonica.

Although I am not musically inclined, my father made sure I learned to play something and his idea of something was a Hammond Organ, like the

one in church, but not that huge. And yes, I played the accordion and the ukulele; I tried my hand at guitar several times to no avail and when my father suggested I learn to play the spoons, well, I turned off the metronome.

But something happened to me when I saw that harmonica; something stirred deep within me. My mother credits it to the fact that my father's people were from Georgia. I had to remind her that his people couldn't stay out of jail long enough to brush their teeth and that just because you're from the south doesn't mean you can play the harmonica. (I don't care what other women in prison claim, my mother invented the saying "whatever!")

Whatever painful memories I had from learning to play the accordion, they did not prevent me trying my hand at music one more time. So I ordered the harmonica and soon discovered that women in prison can throw more than just insults with a bull's eye accuracy. And yes, I will admit that my first round of applause came when I dropped the damn thing and two screws popped out, rendering it almost unplayable. But I had rubber bands. They lasted about one week. And shortly after, I fell into a deep depression.

I reached a point where writing and reading no longer mattered; where music became irritating. I cocooned myself in depression, becoming more suicidal than usual. I spent countless hours looking at the window frame deciding how to hang myself, but something would not allow me to rise and tie the noose. I had tied it a thousand times in my mind but there was this force, something I could not identify that kept me motionless in my chair. I wrote to my parents and told of the demise of my harmonica and about my depression. It wasn't more than two weeks later when I received a harmonica from my father, a Hohner harmonica manufactured in Germany. This was the real McCoy. It would never need rubber bands! But my depression kept the new harmonica in its blue case.

Then there was the bear.

The cell next to mine became vacant and in moved an African American woman. I started to call her "Bear" and we rapidly became friends. I told her about my harmonica and she told me she played piano and she would be glad to help me in any way. I told her no thanks, I just wasn't into it. But she nagged me to the point where I finally agreed to meet her in the back of the common room.

We sat facing each other with nothing between us except my insecurities and depression. "Well, go on, play me something." And with that said, Bear closed her eyes. For some reason, that took a tremendous amount of pressure off and I raised my harmonica to my lips. I slowly played the only song I knew by heart—Amazing Grace. When I finished, Bear sat with her

eyes closed for what seemed eternity, but when she opened them, she smiled.

"Not bad, not bad at all. But why are you playing for me?" Anger consumed me and I shouted at her, "What the hell are you talking about? You're the one who asked me to play for you."

I would find out that this was one very smart bear. The next weeks were filled with work, depression, and at night, music lessons from Bear. But she didn't teach me about timing or how to read music: she taught me self-confidence.

Bear explained that I needed to play for myself, that music, the notes must come from somewhere deep within, and it was my job to find that place for each note, each song. I will never forget the first time she had me stand, close my eyes, and play for myself. Somewhere deep within came notes of depression, of rejection, of suicide. Deep within came The Blues.

When you play the harmonica, there are two types of harmonizing notes: notes of resolution and wailing notes. Storytelling, which is what the Blues is, builds tension and then releases it, resolves it. First there is the wailing, then there is the healing.

I am serving time in the only maximum security prison for women in the state of New York. Every day is filled with tension and with resolving problems, and there are days when fifteen minutes cannot pass without another problem surfacing. This is a house that G-d rarely visits, and it is sad to admit, but there is very little music here other than radios. I believe that because very few play musical instruments that this actually increases the level of tension, and when the options to resolve problems are so limited, tensions go unresolved. The logic is clear: unresolved tensions spark violence. I have often joked about starting a prison marching band, but under the humor is an idea I believe would give us more options to resolve tensions. Instead of meeting in the tunnel to cut another, women could meet and see who could hit the highest note and who could hold it the longest. Being able to make a decision other than violence, empowers, and being empowered is a rarity in prison; making decisions is almost non-existent.

I cannot decide what I am going to wear, what or when I am going to eat, when I will take a shower, or when I will see a doctor. I can't just roll over in the morning and decide not to go to work. I can't decide to pack my bags and move because I don't get along with my neighbors. When I entered prison, I lost my right, or what I have learned is actually a privilege, to make daily decisions about my life. But there is one decision the Department of Corrections can never take away from me: how I decide to react in any given situation.

How I react determines the amount of tension in my life. When an officer barks at me, ordering me to sweep a corridor, I decide how I am going to react, and how I react then determines how the officer will react. How I react to the officer can bring resolution to the tension that comes from being barked at. It is tension followed by resolution. It is wailing followed by healing. It is the Blues. Before I go any further, you must know that I have not been able to live by my reactions every day. At those times when I tell an officer to go to hell, or when I lose my temper because another inmate violates my private space and we almost come to blows, these are lessons, not defeats.

When I play the Blues, people react. The way people have reacted to my harmonica playing has caused me to do something I swore I would never do again: write.

Being a Jewish lesbian and a poet/writer in a maximum security prison who plays the harmonica sometimes feels like serving time in Antarctica. But there is one thing all writers understand: we have experienced the wailing, then the healing. We have all experienced the Blues. The solution, the resolution, is found in the tip of our pens, at the banging of our typewriters, or with the soft thump of our computers.

It doesn't matter how we write or where we write; what matters is that we do write. Writing is music and music is writing put to sound. As women, as writers, and as musicians, whether we are incarcerated or not, we have an obligation to give to the world our writings, our music. Our writings are in the Canon; we must keep firing off essays, poems, and historical masterpieces. Our music is in the Music Canon; we must continue to march to that different drummer and create music that will be played in concert halls, halls that will be filled to capacity.

We must never stop writing; we must never stop writing music.



Jess McVey- "Untitled Sculpture 2"

Photo by Judy Reed

Jess McVey

## How Did I Get Here?

As a starter, I am Jess McVey, 86 years old, an artist. How did I get here from being a mother of five and the wife of a university professor?

As part of my second life, I was living in a community group on 180 acres of Magic land in the Columbia Gorge, Oregon. After the communal evening meal, members tended to go into their own spaces in the winter, closing their doors.

I was alone, not in a relationship. Walking about I noticed the beauty of prunings from our fruit trees. Bark had come off and the natural wood color was gleaming in the Oregon dampness. I gathered some up from the driveway.

Admiring the colors and shapes under my kerosene lamp, I began to play with them; made some simple earrings. A tremendous excitement came over me. I was not alone any longer.

I was launched; so from this I went through many phases from becoming a lesbian to learning to trust my abilities. Eventually I could look a person in the eye and say I am an environmental sculptor instead of shuffling my feet, looking at the ground; saying well, I make a few things with my hands, when asked what I did.

Now I see the world around me differently.



Photo by Judy Reed

Jess McVey- "Untitled Sculpture 3"

Bonnie J. Morris

## When Lesbians Ruled the Earth

The recent deaths of poet-activist June Jordan and women's music founding artists Kay Gardner and Ginni Clemmens represent a cumulative loss of talent and herstory that have sent our lesbian communities reeling with grief. During the post September 11th stress from terrorism and more recent war preparations, lesbian feminists have, as always, turned to our artists, poets and journalists for both intellectual and spiritual answers. Other women are mourning the deaths of lesbian journalist Sarah Pettit and, not too long ago, lesbian cartoonist/satirist Kris Kovick. To lose so many sages in one short period has been daunting, particularly because the lesbian community, while deeply affected by the challenges of breast cancer and environmental illnesses, has not experienced the abrupt, enormous loss of young artists, the funeral-after-funeral demographic that gay men grieved in the AIDS onset period. Many of us who felt entitled to point the finger at unsafe sex practices somehow believed that lesbians were an ageless tribe, spared, special; the Angel of Death would "pass over" us. I cringe to think of the numberless letters to editors I wrote whenever a fundamentalist called AIDS God's punishment to homosexuals: "Then why aren't lesbians dying?" was my smugly insensitive challenge to various reverends/congressmen. Not only did we wrongly believe we were immune to STD's, we also upheld our conviction that lesbians were less ageist than gay men, less youth-and-looks based, and hence we'd not only live forever but still be considered hot and sexy Goddess mamas at an age when guys snubbed one another in bars. We prized our unglamorous looks, our survivor stories, comparing athletic injuries, putting tattoos on mastectomy scars. Nothing could kill us—look at Miss Ruth Ellis-100 years! And it was forgivable, even hip, to lack medical insurance—every lesbian I knew was a struggling artist, craftswoman, writer, outside the mainstream, and when someone was ill the hand-printed flyers went around the women's music festivals, PLEASE DONATE to so-and-so's medical costs. The best health care in the world was and is available at the Michigan festival, where festiegoers not only had access to more/nicer/better physicians than most of us could afford at home, and workers were entitled to a hour-long massage in the chiropractic tent.

That two of the longest-lasting [yet by no means OLD] activists in the women's music movement could be taken from us within six months—that Kay Gardner's heart attack might have been forestalled by her doctor, and that Ginni's car accident shouldn't have happened—makes many of us

middle-aging dykes feel keenly vulnerable, aware of creeping time and unplanned exits. What are the conversations we should be having with our not-so-elders while they're here? Who is going to remember, preserve, and archive the legacy of the women's music movement [besides me, Kim Kimber, Judy Dlugacz, Toni Armstrong Jr., June Millington, and the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe]? I was a "youngster" in the peak years of the women's festival movement, discovering Michigan in 1981 when I had just turned twenty; my whole young adult life fit snugly into the era I've called *When Lesbians Ruled the Earth*. Women's bookstores, presses, radical newspapers, \$4 concerts, weekend festivals, self-defense classes, art and culture all flourished. Few of us cared about or even owned expensive clothes with designer labels; we cut our own hair in front of the bathroom mirror with the same scissors we used for prepping posters to march in pro-choice rallies [we were on the front lines for straight women's rights, too.] Woman-only space was simply assumed as a prerogative. We made these rules and enforced them; no one expected to get rich, but we thought we'd all grow old together, and a few brave souls started women's land communities as a feisty alternative to old-age homes. I, for one, envisioned myself on some front porch at age eighty listening to the memories of my 95-year-old pals [I always ran with the "big girls."] My friends, likewise optimistic, bought lifetime passes to women's music festivals, and I recall the thrill I felt at 20 to read that once I reached age 60 or 65, I'd be able to get into Michigan free! I assumed it would all be there for me, in year 2021—my favorite musicians, festivals, bookstores. While Michigan is still going strong [all hail Michigan, Michigan, beloved Michigan!], at barely 41 I'm beginning to GET IT about the temporary nature of a specific world I dwelt in for over two decades. And as an historian, I can document and grieve at the same time, noting the closure of almost every women's bookstore I ever perused, the bankruptcy of independent lesbian presses that were poised to publish my next books [ouch!], the disappearance of ten or so other women's music festivals, the unprecedented hostility toward Michigan's woman-born policy. But the actual deaths of artists I've partied with? Whoa. The historian reels, is silenced. And as a "younger" friend to Kay and Ginni, I even feel a certain shame: did I interview them enough, praise their contributions enough in my work and to their faces, when they were, so so recently, ALIVE? Ginni, who came up to me at a party celebrating the publication of my book on festival culture and then said "I haven't read your book yet because I'm afraid I might not be in it." How keenly the non-mainstream yearn to be remembered! And yes, that is my job. Married to the lesbian community, I will love and honor them all in sickness and in health.



Grasping my own mortality, my impermanence, as well as my obligation to honor the radical dykes before me, I finally wrote my will, arranged to donate all my women's music archives to the Radcliffe library special collection [where my papers will live forever alongside those of Alix Dobkin, Holly Near, Del Martin ... Phyllis Lyon], and now young lesbians who are 21 to my 41 are writing to me for herstorical fact-checking about the separatist 70s, 80s, 90s: when we ruled, and took shit from no one. The thing about coming out as a very young dyke [I was a teenager] is that you will, perhaps, outlive some of your heroines. I'd like to recommend that some of the younger lesbians bent on trashing the Michigan festival instead shift energy into interviewing the many older artists who made lesbian music possible, yet never became "famous." Love them while they're here; don't let gay celebrity culture, which has so replaced grassroots, wipe out the great record of those lesbians who made records.

Lilith Rogers

### *Lusty Melody*

*Sometimes when I look  
into her dark brown eyes  
a sweet deep hummm  
begins to thrummm  
inside of me.  
And sometimes when I watch  
her rise  
dripping from her bath  
I feel a longing strummm  
rumble along my limbs.  
Then  
when she settles her soft, soft self  
beside me in the bed  
a sultry siren song  
begins a wild rush all through me  
and I'm ready for her  
ready for her  
to release my long and lusty  
melody.*

October 31st, 2004



Photo by Grace Berge

"Music has been the balance in my life. It's led me to love...it's led me to freedom...I don't know anything else. It's been my gift."

Gwen Avery

## Contributors' Notes

---

**Laura Aguilar** was born in 1959 in San Gabriel, California. Her work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennial, Italy; the Los Angeles City Hall Bridge Gallery, the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), Los Angeles Photography Center, Women's Center Gallery at the University of California in Santa Barbara, Self Help Graphics, all in CA; and the University of Illinois in Chicago, IL. She was an Artist in Residence at Light Works in Syracuse, NY in 1993; received a Brody Grant from the California Community Foundation in 1992; received an Artist in Residence grant from the California Arts Council through the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center of Los Angeles in 1991/92; and an Artist's Project Grant from LACE in that same year.

**Tangren Alexander** teaches philosophy at Southern Oregon University, remodels houses, and writes, currently, a memoir, *Tenderly: Remembering Deborah Kerr*. A long-time member of the Southern Oregon Women Writers' Group, she has published in *Teaching Philosophy*, *Hypatia*, *WomanSpirit*, and has stories in *A Woman's Touch*, *Intricate Passions*, and elsewhere.

**Kathleen Allen** is an inmate at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, New York, and a student in the Mercy College master's program in English literature. She is a writing tutor for the inmate students in the undergraduate program at Bedford Hills, sponsored by Marymount Manhattan College. Her poetry has been published in the Hiram Poetry Review.

**Jamie Anderson** releases her eighth album in the spring of 2005. She's lost touch with Lois as well as other women from those early years in Phoenix and would love to reconnect with them. Jamie lives in Durham, NC, with her partner of seven years, three cats and a dog. She still loves funny songs but plays the required amount of serious tunes so her folk singer card is not revoked. [www.jamieanderson.com](http://www.jamieanderson.com).

**Kristan Aspen** is a musician and community organizer who realized she was a lesbian in 1970 while visiting Cuba with the Brigada Venceremos. Back home in Portland, Oregon, she promptly came out in a feminist collective that founded a women's clinic, a women's bookstore, and a halfway house for women returning from prison. In 1975, that house became Brad-

ley-Angle House, the oldest domestic violence shelter on the West Coast; Kristan is now Bradley-Angle's Development Director. She dreams of time to write her-story of lesbian/womyn's culture.

**Sierra Lonepine Briano:** I am a 58 year old dyke living at ArtSprings, twelve beautiful acres in Oregon. ArtSprings is a retreat for women artists and writers.

**Becky Banasiak Code:** A former neurobiologist and biomedical researcher, I now teach part-time in order to pursue my writing. I've had essays and poetry published in *Notre Dame Magazine*, *Weird Sisters West*, and *Pleasant Living Magazine*. My partner and I live in Athens, Ohio.

**karen cooper:** 55 this year, retired Park Ranger, lover of nature. Creating art in various medium for my own pleasure. Photography is my latest passion.

**Tee A. Corinne:** An artist and a writer, Tee A. Corinne grew up in the South; studied art, history, and literature (M.F.A., Pratt, 1968); and moved west in 1972. She is the author of one novel, three collections of short stories, *The Cunt Coloring Book* (1975), *Intimacies* (2001), and *Drawing as a Problem Solving Activity* (2002). Born a double Scorpio in 1943 (November 3, a birth date she shares with lesbian literary historian Jeannette H. Foster), she is currently finishing a book on lesbian art history.

**Alix Dobkin,** raised in Philadelphia, was a guitar-teenager in the 1950's. Immediately after graduating from the Tyler School of Fine Arts, Alix headed north to NYC's world-famous Gaslight Cafe, and from that rich, heady, heart of Greenwich Village culture, launched her full-time, professional folk singing career in the early 60's. Focusing during the first decade on an international and contemporary/ protest repertoire, she came out as a Lesbian in 1972 and turned to writing and singing for women in general and to building Lesbian Culture in particular. Over the last 25 years, Alix has traveled to hundreds of women's communities in the USA and abroad.

**Barbara Ester** is a Lesbian, singer, songwriter and massage therapist living in Hyde Park, Utah. She has three recordings of her own music. Out since 1969 she has experienced a sweet transition in gay/Lesbian community. She recently worked directing and performing in a theater production: *Finding Voice* with battered women. Currently she is working on another recording of Music for Lesbians. She can be contacted via: [barbaraester@care2.com](mailto:barbaraester@care2.com)

**Ferron:** Born on June 2, 1952, Ferron grew up in a semi-rural suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia, the eldest of seven children in a working-class family. After leaving home at 15, she scrambled financially, supporting herself by driving a cab, waitressing, shoveling gravel, and packing five pound bags of coffee in a factory. From her basement, she recorded and distributed "Ferron" (1977) and "Ferron Backed Up" (1978). In 1978, Ferron was "discovered" by Gayle Scott, an American living and working in film production in Vancouver. More information at [www.ferrononline.com](http://www.ferrononline.com).

**Roxanna Fiamma:** I was born in Denver in 1943, Italian American, grew up working class. I came out as a Lesbian in the late 60s and as a Separatist in the mid-70s. I retired from teaching Physical Education in 1993 due to the lesbophobia I had to endure for being a visible Dyke. I live in northern California where I enjoy birds, trees, ritual, and my home with my former lover Fran Day.

**Judy Freespirit** is a 68 year old lesbian writer and activist who lives and works in Oakland, California. She is a woman of many identities who has been known to step into phone booths to change her costume. Regardless of what she is wearing, she remains a fat dyke.

**Carolyn Gage** is a lesbian-feminist playwright, performer, director, and activist. The author of four books on lesbian theatre and forty-eight plays, musicals, and one-woman shows, she specializes in non-traditional roles for women, especially those reclaiming famous lesbians whose stories have been distorted or erased from history.

**Sheridan Gold** began playing the flute when she was eight and continued into college, but never discovered the natural high in music until she began drumming in her mid-forties. With a Master's in Special Education, Sheridan is able to use her undergraduate music degree by teaching her students the joys of drumming. The students not only learn African drumming, but they learn how to play together, each experiencing how to be a leader and a follower. Drumming is a powerful medium that can bring all people together, no matter what the differences are. Sheridan's students perform once a quarter to the delight of their classmates.

**Bethroot Gwynn** has been playing around with Personal Theater since 1980 — teaching, directing, performing. She lives at Fly Away Home lesbian land in Southern Oregon, where she grows food, tends land, creates theater,

ritual, and writing. Her poems and essays have been published in several journals, including the *WeMoon Datebook*, for which she is a Special Editor. Her most recent theater work is *Women: The Longest Revolution. A Performance Documentary*. She can be reached at PO Box 593, Myrtle Creek, OR 97457.

**Ann Hackler** is the Executive Director and a founding member of The Institute for the Musical Arts. More information at [www.ima.org](http://www.ima.org).

**Virginia R. Harris:** Since 1992, I have pursued quilting arts full time. I presently live in Santa Rosa, California.

**Happy/L.A. Hyder:** I revel in the making of art and the fact I am now able to baaft (a verb I recently coined meaning to be an artist full time). I encourage you to visit my new web site: [www.lahyderphotography.com](http://www.lahyderphotography.com) and support me by falling for and buying an image(s) that can support you in your life. My goal as an artist is to bring my viewers from the mundane into an erotics of space & place. Actually, this pretty much sums up my view of everything. With writing becoming as solid as visual art in my life, I'm thrilled to join the two together in *Sinister Wisdom*, a favorite of mine since forever.

**Sarita Johnson's** illustrations have appeared throughout the Bay Area in many publications including *Onyx—the Black Lesbian Newsletter*, *Aché*, *On Our Backs*, and *Outlook*. She is also the author and illustrator of the coloring book *A Beach Party With Alexis*. Sarita is currently a classroom teacher of second and third graders at Sequoia Elementary School in Oakland.

**Susan E. Keleher** was born in Iowa farm country. The end of her 20 year marriage led her into the field of nutrition working with dialysis patients. She also works hard at maintaining a close relationship with her four children and twin grandchildren. When time allows, among other things she enjoys writing and taking sculpting courses.

**Lori L. Lake**, author of lesbian fiction and freelance reviewer for *Midwest Book Review*, Golden Crown Literary Society's *The Crown*, *The Independent Gay Writer*, and *Just About Write*.

**Hawk Madrone** has been living on remote women's land in southern Oregon for almost thirty years, where she purposes to do Tai Chi as a way of life. With her animal companions always nearby, she is a woodworker, gardener, photographer, baker, teacher, writer. Madrone's poetry and prose have

been published in *Womanspirit*; *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*; *We'Moon: Gaia Rhythms for Women*; *Maize*; *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*; and in the anthologies *Our Lives: Lesbian Personal Writings*; *The Poetry of Sex*; *The Wild Good*; and *An Intricate Weave*. Her memoir, *Weeding at Dawn: A Lesbian Country Life*, was published by The Harrington Park/Haworth Press in 2000. Her work is forthcoming in the anthologies *Gardening at a Deeper Level* and *Small Town Gay*.

**Ona Marae:** I am a 39 year old, fat, disabled lesbian living and writing in Denver, CO. I have written non-fiction for many years, including reporting for LIC (Lesbians in Colorado) in the early 90s and editing a newsletter for a safehouse for battered women and children. I have recently made the change to writing both non-fiction and fiction. I write to supplement my poverty level income and to express the magnificence and power I find in women in my life.

**Rose Marcario** is a lesbian poet and essayist, her work has appeared in numerous national journals and magazines including: *Tricycle*, *Wisconsin Review*, *ELM*, *Pacific Review*, *Eclipse*, *Karamu*, *Calyx*, *Yellow Silk*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Hawaii Pacific Review* and *Poet's Against the War*. She has been active for twenty years in lesbian theatre, and has produced and acted in many acclaimed productions, including Judy Grahn's *Queen of Swords*. She is currently working on a non-fiction book. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

**Jess McVey** is an 86-year-old environmental artist, sculptor and painter living in San Francisco, California. Her work is included in *Damn Fine Art: Lesbian Artists* by Cherry Smyth. She was part of the making of the documentary video "West Coast Crones," produced and directed by Madeline Muir. McVey works to educate decision makers about using alternative energies; she encourages respect and responsibility for the Earth and Seas.

**Mary Meriam's** early life, through college graduation, was filled to the brim with singing, dancing, playing instruments, performing, composing, drawing, painting, and studying art. Her favorite teachers were lesbians, and they gave her an "extracurricular" cultural education. She sang in the choir that one conducted; danced in the modern dances that another choreographed; and worked as an artist's assistant. Although not identified as "lesbian" culture, this experience of learning culture from lesbians was like a taste of Lesbos in Sappho's day. "Sonata" written in 1975, was Mary's first lesbian poem, and is dedicated to the memory of the cellist and conductor,

Scotty Banks.

**Bonnie J. Morris:** I am a 43 year old women's studies professor and lesbian writer living and teaching in Washington, D.C. I've published six books since 1997, including a tribute to women's music festivals [*Eden Built By Eves*] and a collection of essays on lesbian identity at the movies [*Girl Reel*], both of which were Lambda Literary Award finalists for lesbian non-fiction. When not in the classroom, I work at women's music festivals and commute to my girlfriend in New York. Look for our book, *52 Pickup*, forthcoming from Bella Books this summer.

**Ruth Mountaingrove,** a single lesbian, leads a busy life in Arcata, California. At 82 she is only two years away from her third Saturn return. She can't seem to stay away from college so she will be taking a few courses in feminism/lesbianism. Humboldt State University now has a minor in Queer studies.

**Marjorie Norris** is an ardent writer who belongs to two writing groups: Women of the Crooked Circle and Spiral Sirens. She was "Just Buffalo Poet-in-Residence" in 1999, and has taught creative writing at State University of Buffalo's Women's Studies Department and Chautauqua Institute, as well as participating in Feminist Women's Writing Workshop in Ithaca, New York and Southern Lesbian Writers' Conference outside Atlanta. She has been published in *Arizona Mandala Quarterly* and other national publications.

**Sudie Rakusin's** love and concern for the Earth and Her creatures influences all of her choices and permeates her work. Rakusin's art has been widely reproduced in newspapers, magazines, and calendars and can be found in such books as *The Once and Future Goddess* by Elinor Gadon, *Seasons of the Witch* by Patricia Monaghan, and *Wickedary, Outercourse,* and *Quintessence* by Mary Daly. She lives outside Hillsborough, North Carolina, on the edge of a meadow with her Great Danes, surrounded by her gardens and a forest. View her work at [www.sudierakusin.com](http://www.sudierakusin.com).

**Reign** is a freelance spiritual writer and poet who contributes extensively to woman spirituality forums. Her subjects have ranged from the loss of feminine consciousness on Earth, nature based/ Goddess spirituality and women's health issues. Her writing aspires to shift and mobilize feminine consciousness.

**Lilith Rogers** is a longtime writer, gardener, and lover of women—especially the latter. She has recently published a CD-Rom, paper-free book



of her poems and photographs (taken by herself and Sun Bell) called *Persimmons and Other Lesbian Erotica*. To order, contact her at [Lilithrogers1@juno.com](mailto:Lilithrogers1@juno.com). She is currently performing a one-woman show about Rachel Carson.

**Jean Sirius** has lived in Oakland, California, since 1982, but at heart she's still just a girl from Kansas. Every single day the universe brings her occasions for laughter and gratitude. She can be found on the web at <http://www.jeansirius.com>.

**Sandy Tate** is a working class, Jewish Dyke Separatist. She opened Feminist Horizons, the first Lesbian Feminist gift store in the U.S., in 1977 in Los Angeles. As a member of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), she continues to pierce the veil of ageism that renders old women invisible.

**Jean Taylor** was born in 1944 and is a radical lesbian feminist writer and political activist based in Melbourne, Australia where she also does tai chi and is an active member of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives collective.

**Jean Weisinger** is a self-taught African American photographer based in Oakland, California. She has traveled to Africa, Cuba, India, Mexico, Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe and throughout the United States. She has exhibited in one person and selected group exhibitions in the United States, Cuba, Africa and India. Her photographs have been published in numerous films, books, and a wide range of publications as well as posters, post cards and calendars. Her photographs are in collections throughout the world.

**Cris Williamson** has long been considered a pioneer in women's music and an energetic trailblazer for many independent women artists who now regularly inhabit the charts. It may be said that she, along with many others, helped foster the birth of an entirely new genre of music. The year marks the 30th anniversary of her classic album, *The Changer and the Changed*. For more information go to [www.criswilliamson.com](http://www.criswilliamson.com).

**zana:** I'm 58, jewish, disabled, a long-time landdyke, writer and artist. currently part of a group seeking to establish a new lesbian land community in southern arizona.

## Book Review

---

### **Minus One: A Twelve-Step Journey by Bridget Bufford**

Alice Street Editions of Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice Street, Binghamton, NY 13904-1580, [www.haworthpress.com](http://www.haworthpress.com)  
2004/238 pgs/\$17.95/ISBN: 1560234687

Reviewed by Lori L. Lake

Stubborn, angry, and fresh out of treatment, Terry Manescu moves in with her friend, Angela, who takes her in provided Terry stays sober and contributes to the household. Terry, at first, doesn't realize the depths of her own pain and is facing a lot more problems than she can imagine fixing. She's got intelligence and guts going for her, but she's also got an attitude which has not entirely changed even with treatment and AA attendance. "Everyone with more sobriety than me thinks that they know what's best for me. AA is a conspiracy to rob me of my individuality and my intellect" (p. 14). Terry says this halfway tongue in cheek, even while at some level, she knows she must change. She just isn't entirely sure how to go about it.

Though only 26, Terry has already been through a lot in her life. Through her own drunken rage, she lost the love of her life. She's got issues with her family, some of which are because she's lesbian, but also because she was such a wild girl, and her connections with her brothers and parents have been affected by all the lies and failures. She flunked out of school, ran with a fast crowd, and did a lot of risky things. She knows the addiction to drugs and alcohol is terrible for her health and well-being, but for a long time she kids herself whenever her shortcomings become apparent to others or to her. "These insinuations about my ego just chap my ass," (p. 31) she says early on. This first-person narrator has got a comic voice at times, and the story she tells is, by turns, very funny—and very heartbreaking.

It takes a long time and quite a number of mistakes before Terry starts to get her head on straight. For anyone who has ever been addicted, particularly to alcohol, or been around others struggling with the nightmare of drunkenness, every angle of her story rings true. When Terry finally admits that she "cannot take the pain of knowing that I can't trust myself, of knowing the rage and insanity that lurk within me, waiting for the next drink," (p. 122), a glimmer of hope can be found. She still has to hit bottom, learn to connect with others while not high, and figure out how to fashion a life

worth living, but with that admission, she is starting to change.

Bufford opens each chapter with a quotation from the 12-Step world, and that's where the title of the book came from: "If there's a minus (step) one, that's where I'm at." But don't mistake this book to be about recovery only. It's a coming-of-age story, a love story, and an entertaining and engrossing journey through one woman's life. I couldn't put the book down and read it in one sitting. I highly recommend it.

---

## Books Received

*Call for Reviewers: We are seeking Lesbians who are interested in reviewing books for Sinister Wisdom. Please contact Fran at [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net) for more information.*

*Canadian Woman Studies / les cahiers de la femme: Benefiting Women? Women's Labor Rights.* York University. [www.yorku.ca/cwscf](http://www.yorku.ca/cwscf).

*Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly (HLFQ).* Haworth Press. (800) Haworth. [www.haworthpress.com/web/HLQF](http://www.haworthpress.com/web/HLQF).

*Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy.* Indiana University Press. [hypatia@msu.edu](mailto:hypatia@msu.edu).

*Kalliope: A Journal of Women's Literature and Art.* Florida Community College at Jacksonville. 11901 Beach Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32246. [www.fccj.edu/kalliope](http://www.fccj.edu/kalliope).

*Startling: Poems.* Andrea Selch. Turning Point, 2004. [www.turningpointbooks.com](http://www.turningpointbooks.com).

### Lesbian Art Books:

*Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks* by Whitney Chadwick

*Damn Fine Art: New Lesbian Artists* by Cherry Smyth

*Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex: An Erotic Collection: Prose, Poetry and Photo Art* by Tee Corrine

*The Red Rose Girls: An Uncommon Story of Art and Love* by Alice A. Carter

*Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs* edited by Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser

## Announcements

### *Sinister Wisdom* Needs Volunteers!

We need volunteers to help with the following:

- \* Coordinating audiorecording *Sinister Wisdom* for print-impaired Lesbians
- \* Fundraising
- \* Outreach
- \* Grantwriting
- \* Guest Editing
- \* Website assistance

For more information, contact Fran at [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net)

**The San Francisco Dyke March Video:** Twenty-nine Dykes from a variety of backgrounds talk about what the Dyke March means to them—with joyous photo stills and video footage of the rally and march. This video was created as part of the SF Dyke March Photo Exhibit. To order a copy of this 15 minute video send a donation of \$25 or more to Cathy Cade, 2202 Rosedale, Ave. Oakland, Ca 94601 with your address. [www.CathyCade.com](http://www.CathyCade.com).

A **Woman's INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY** is being organized for rural Pima County in Arizona, USA (Tucson area). Our ecofeminist land trust will provide access for low-income and chemically sensitive women (EI) and will emphasize healing ourselves and the Earth. Landdykes, Goddess wimmin, permaculturalists, environmental and social justice activists, mud builders, and other community-oriented women are invited to join our planning team and/or get on our mailing list. For our proposal, questionnaire, etc. contact Upward Spiral c/o Jetana, POBox 86985, Tucson, AZ 85754 USA; [upwardspiral1950@yahoo.com](mailto:upwardspiral1950@yahoo.com); or phone (520) 820-3876 between 10 AM and 4PM MST, preferably on weekends.

## Issues of *Lesbian Ethics* available for the cost of postage.

*Lesbian Ethics*, a journal of separatist and radical lesbian thinking, was published from 1984 -1994. There are many important, still relevant and luminous writings in her pages. Each issue had a theme, though there are several pieces in each issue not on the theme. The available issues are: Vol 2 #3 Sex, 3 #1 Magic, 3 #2 Separatism, 3 #3 Humor, 4 #1 Parthenogenesis, 4 #3 Daughter Rape, 5 #1 Our Mothers, 5 #2 Lesbian Community, 5 #3 Radical Healing.

US book rate postage is: 1-2 copies \$2, 3-7 copies \$3, 8-9 copies \$4. Checks can be made to Whiptail Ent. and sent to PO Box 634, Ribera, NM 87560. Write for faster postage or outside the US.

## Susan Levinkind

The Lesbian Tax Mom  
*20 years of tax preparation*

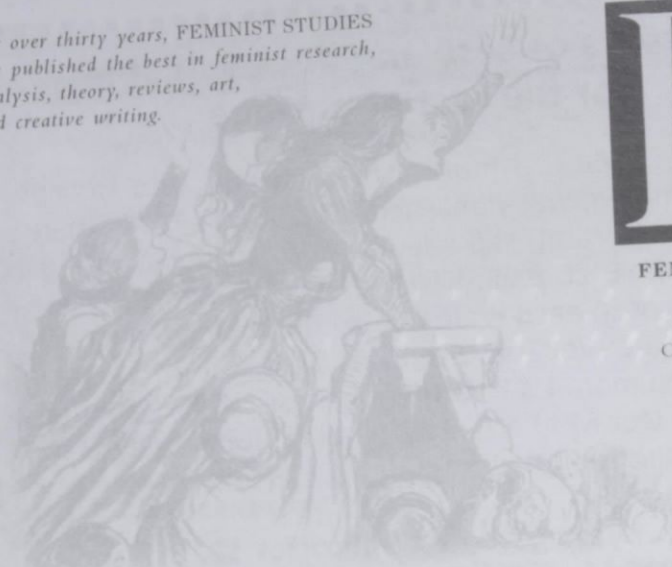


Specializing in self-employeds,  
but able to help any woman  
feel more knowledgable about and  
in control of her tax situation.

So don't worry!

510-383-9858 • [levinkind@netscape.net](mailto:levinkind@netscape.net)

For over thirty years, FEMINIST STUDIES has published the best in feminist research, analysis, theory, reviews, art, and creative writing.



**FEMINIST STUDIES**  
0103 Taliaferro Hall  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

**2005/Volume 31: Three Issues: Spring, Summer, Fall**

	<b>1 year</b>	<b>2 years</b>	<b>3 years</b>	<b>single/back issues</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$33	<input type="checkbox"/> \$60	<input type="checkbox"/> \$85	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15 _____ / _____ / _____
<b>Institutions</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$180	<input type="checkbox"/> \$324	<input type="checkbox"/> \$447	<input type="checkbox"/> \$65 _____ / _____ / _____
<b>Students<sup>†</sup></b>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25			(for example: 28.3)
<b>NWSA members<sup>††</sup></b>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25			

<sup>†</sup>Photocopy of dated proof of current student status is required. <sup>††</sup>NWSA coupon is required.

**FOREIGN ORDERS** must add postage: \$18 per year for surface mail; \$45 per year airmail.

Payment enclosed for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment must be in U.S. currency and made payable through a U.S. bank

CHECK OR MONEY ORDER  
(payable to Feminist Studies)

VISA     MASTERCARD

ACCOUNT # \_\_\_\_\_

EXP. DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_

**SUBSCRIBERS:** Please use this order form and bring FEMINIST STUDIES to the attention of friends, colleagues, your library ordering department, and anyone else who is interested in serious feminist scholarship. Feel free to make copies of this form.

New from The Haworth Press...

# Cutting-Edge Lesbian Fiction

Take 10% OFF 1 Book, 15% OFF 2 Books,  
or 20% OFF 3 Books! Use Code BK123  
when ordering online.



## Descanso *A Soul Journey*

NEW BOOK!

A novel by Cynthia Tyler

Psychotherapist Chris Cameron searches for her own life after the death of her beloved.

\$14.95 soft. ISBN: 1-56023-549-7.  
Available Summer 2005. Approx. 150 pp.

## An Emergence of Green

NEW BOOK!

A novel by Katherine V. Forrest

"One of the best selling lesbian novels  
of all time."

—*Rubyfruit Review*

In this classic of lesbian literature,  
pampered trophy wife Carolyn Blake  
meets her new neighbor—tall, athletic  
artist Val Hunter—and experiences  
emotions she has never felt before.

\$16.95 soft. ISBN: 1-56023-542-X.  
Available Spring 2005. Approx. 189 pp.

## Women of Mystery An Anthology

NEW BOOK!

Edited by Katherine V. Forrest

A collection of fourteen stories of  
mystery and suspense by the best known  
lesbian mystery writers.

\$19.95 soft. ISBN: 1-56023-543-8.  
Available Fall 2005. Approx. 224 pp.



**Alice Street Editions™**

An Imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.  
10 Alice Street Binghamton, NY 13904-1580 USA  
Tel: 1-800-429-6784 • Fax: 1-800-895-0582  
Outside US/Canada Tel: 607-722-5857  
Fax: 607-771-0012 • [www.HaworthPress.com](http://www.HaworthPress.com)

## Shadows of the Night *Queer Tales of the Uncanny and Unusual*

NEW BOOK!

Edited by Greg Herren

"*CREEPY, WHIMSICAL, AND DARING.*"

—Warren Dunford, Author of *Making a Killing*  
and *Soon To Be a Major Motion Picture*

"*EERIE, MACABRE, SUSPENSEFUL,  
HUMOROUS, SEXY.*"

—Michael Huxley, Editor of *Saints & Sinners*,  
Editorial Director, STARBooks Press

An anthology of gay and lesbian  
horror stories.

\$16.95 soft. ISBN: 1-56023-394-X.  
2004. 208 pp.

Take 20% OFF Journals! Use Code JRL20 when ordering online.

Request a FREE copy at: [www.HaworthPress.com/web/HLFQ](http://www.HaworthPress.com/web/HLFQ)

## Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly™

An international journal focusing on  
lesbian writing, including fiction, novel  
excerpts, poetry, essays, and drama.

Volume 5, No. 1—Spring 2004

Volume 6, No. 1—Spring 2005

SKU#: J161. Quarterly (4 issues per volume).

Subscription rates before discount (per volume):

Individuals: \$28/ Institutions: \$48/ Libraries: \$85

Members of the Gay/Lesbian Caucus of the  
Modern Language Association may receive a  
30% discount off individual subscriptions to the  
journal. Please use code GLC30 when ordering.  
To join the Caucus, please contact LGSN,  
Journals Fulfillment, Duke University Press,  
P.O. Box 90660, Durham, NC 27708, or visit the  
Web site at [www.stewards.edu/hum/klawitter/  
mla/join.html](http://www.stewards.edu/hum/klawitter/mla/join.html)

**POSTAGE AND HANDLING US: \$4.00 for  
first book and \$1.50 for each additional  
book. Outside US: \$5.00 for first book and  
\$2.00 for each additional book.**

EAD05

# off our backs

since 1970



All the feminist news that's fit to print...  
*and some that's not!*

- Cutting edge
- Irreverent
- Woman-centered
- Radical
- Activist
- Visionary
- Controversial
- Subversive

Subscribe at  
[www.offourbacks.org](http://www.offourbacks.org)

Only  
\$25

or call 202-234-8072



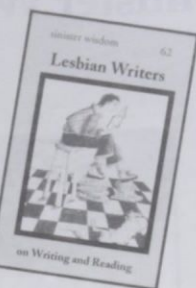
# Sinister Wisdom

## Back Issues Available

- #63 *Lesbians and Nature*
- #62 *Lesbian Writers on Reading and Writing*
- #61 *Women Loving Women in Prison*
- #59/60 *Love, sex & romance*
- #58 *Open issue*
- #57 *Healing*
- #55 *Exploring issues of racial & sexual identification*
- #54 *Lesbians & religion*
- #53 *Old dykes/lesbians-guest edited by lesbians over 60*
- #52 *Allies issue*
- #51 *New lesbian writing*
- #50 *Not the ethics issue-find out why!*
- #49 *The lesbian body*
- #48 *Lesbian resistance including work by dykes in prison*
- #47 *Lesbians of color: Tellin' It Like It 'Tis*
- #46 *Dyke lives*
- #45 *Lesbians & class the first issue of a lesbian journal edited entirely by poverty and working class dykes*
- #43/44 *15th Anniversary double-size (368 pgs) retrospective issue*
- #41 *Italian American Women's issue*
- #40 *Friendship*
- #39 *Disability*
- #36 *Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating emotional well being in our communities*
- #35 *Passing*
- #34 *Sci-Fi, Fantasy & lesbian visions*
- #33 *Wisdom*
- #32 *Open Issue*



Lesbians and Nature



*Sinister Wisdom* — A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal  
 The oldest surviving lesbian literary journal- now celebrating 28 years  
 Create, read, write, draw, explore, cry fantasize, argue, celebrate, learn,  
 teach, laugh, relate with writers and artists like: Chrystos, Terri Jewell, Beth  
 Brant, Julia Youngblood, Elana Dykewomon, JEB, Sapphire, Victoria Lena  
 Manyarrows, Caryatis Cardea, Jamie Lee Evans, Gloria Anzaldúa, Irena  
 Klepfisz, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, Adrienne Rich, Minnie Bruce  
 Pratt, Sharon Lim-Hing, Aly Kim, Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Melanie Kaye/  
 Kantrowitz, Judith Witherow, Katherine Forrest, and many many more.

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

1 year = 3 issues

Individual • 1 year \$20 • 2 years \$34

Out of U.S. \$25 (US\$)

Hardship \$10-15

Institutions & Libraries 1 year \$33

Sustaining \$50-200

Free on request to women in prison or psychiatric institutions

SINISTER WISDOM, INC. • POBOX 3252 • BERKELEY, CA 94703 • USA

Please send : Sinister Wisdom Subscription (see rates above)

\$..... Back issues @\$5. each (circle): 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40,  
 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58

\$..... Back issues @\$6. each (circle): 43/44, 59/60, 61, 62, 63

\$..... Postage & Handling \$1.50 first, 50 cents each after that

\$..... Tax deductible donation to support free and hardship subscriptions

\$..... TOTAL ENCLOSED

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

## Submission Guidelines

**Submissions and correspondence** for SW #66 and #67 should be sent to [fran@sonic.net](mailto:fran@sonic.net) or mailed to SW c/o Fran Day, POB 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180. Submissions for SW #65 should be sent to Guest Editor Merry Gangemi. See page 5 for details. Please read the submission guidelines below before sending material.

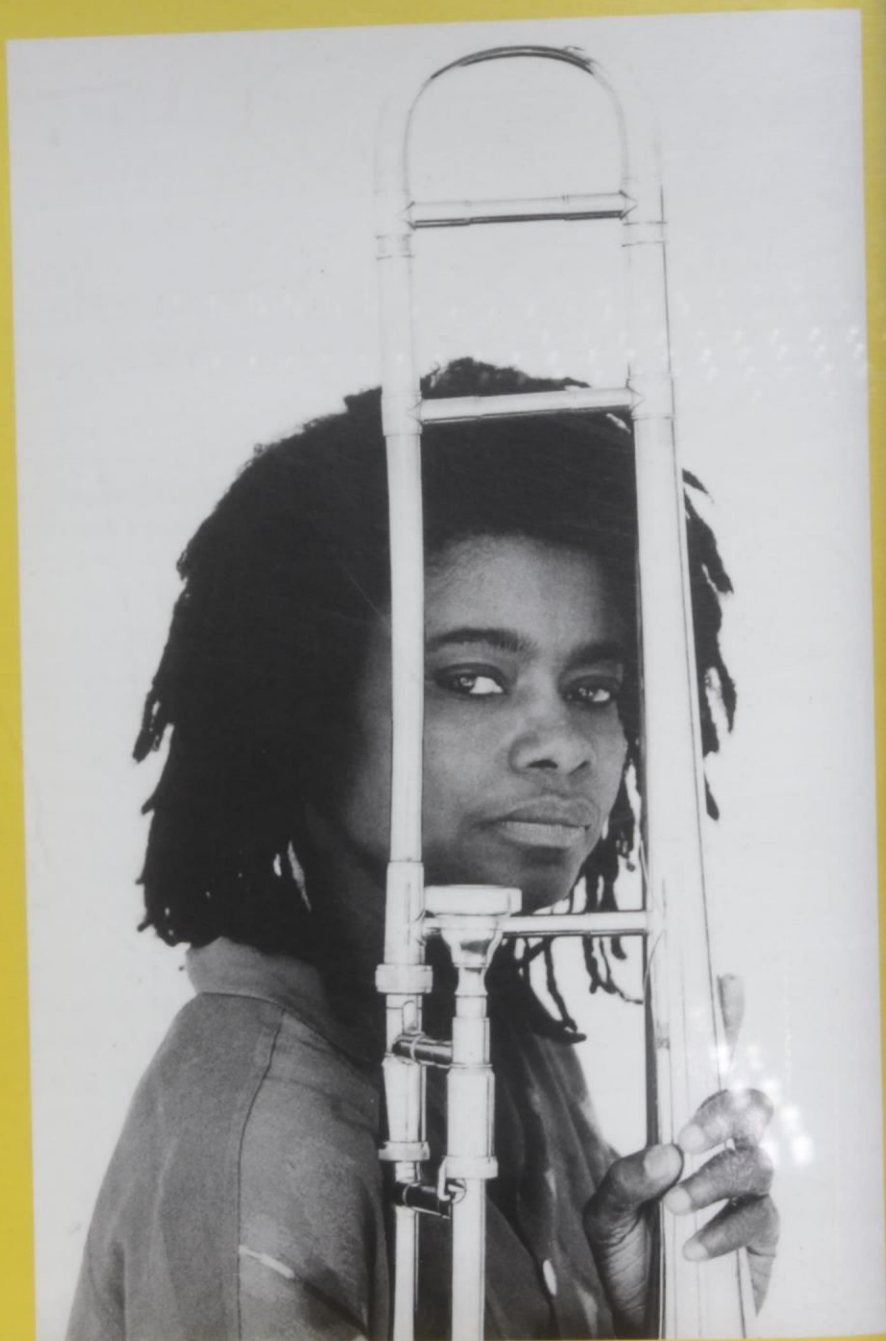
Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Check our website at [www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://www.sinisterwisdom.org).

### **Submission Guidelines: Please read carefully.**

Submission may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2,500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, submissions must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 225 for photos or 600 for line drawings. TIFF's are preferred. Include a short autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed. Selection may take up to nine months.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our lives, joy, and survival. We are looking for guest editors for future issues.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and psychiatric institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. \* Enclose an extra \$10 to \$50 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). \* Give Sinister Wisdom for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. \* Please consider doing a benefit or subscription drive for Sinister Wisdom in your area.



\$6 US