



HOT WIRE

THE JOURNAL OF WOMEN'S MUSIC AND CULTURE

**KATHY
NAJIMY**

THE MAINSTREAMING
OF WOMEN'S CULTURE

JANIS IAN • SARA CYTRON

SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER

THE HENSONS MEET THE
DEEP SOUTH WELCOME
WAGON FROM HELL

1st COMEDY CONFERENCE

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WOMEN'S MUSIC ON THE
HIGH SEAS • VERLEN IN
RUSSIA • ZRAZY IN IRELAND

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

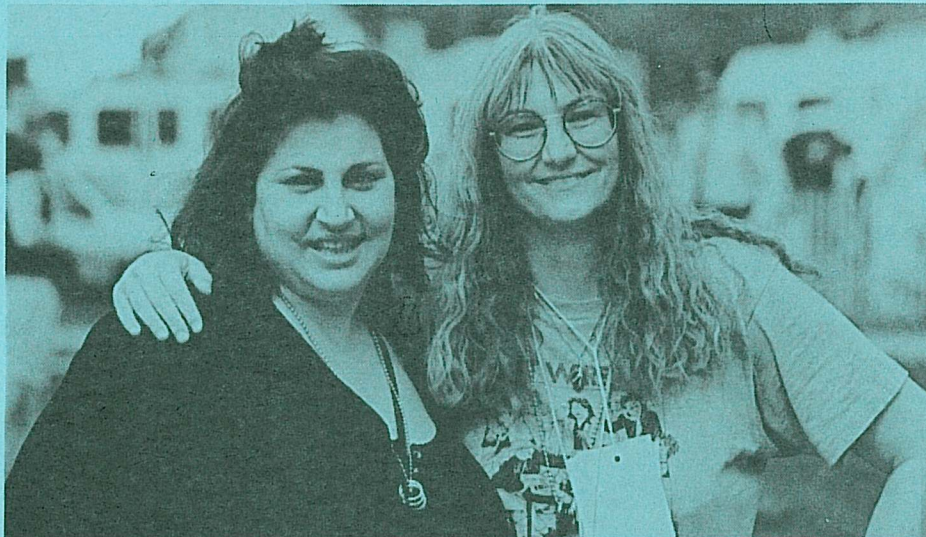
As our annual Mother's Day offering, we'd like to point your attention to the soundsheet cut by The Sugar Hill Duo (R. Jay and Punky Allbright). Music has always been central to the lives of this mother-daughter jazz team. Mama Jay is not only Punky's mother, she's also a musical foremother to us all. We often find ourselves wishing we could have seen the "greats" that are profiled in these pages as musical foremothers; here's one who's living and performing in jazz and women's music venues. Read her fascinating story beginning on page 40. Don't forget to make time to honor all the mothers in your own life—including our cultural foremothers. Feminists are partial to the term "matriarchy," and one of the most obvious ways to *live* the matriarchy (instead of just theorizing about it) is to actively prioritize the magical mother-daughter bond.

FAIRY GODMOMS

We apologize that the list of *HOT WIRE* financial sponsors was accidentally omitted from the last issue. Without the contributions of hard-earned dollars from you generous souls, *HOT WIRE* would have slashed quality and size, or simply folded, long ago. From January 1993 to when we went to press March 1, Fairy Godmothers had given us \$9,784 (\$7,550 of that in 1993). The cash gifts from the Godmoms are extra special to us, because these people are not lured into sending the money by offers of "free" merchandise or subscription discounts. They do it out of pure commitment to women's culture. We love you; the staff and readers thank you for allowing us to continue into our tenth year.

FROM THE ALL-GOOD-THINGS-MUST-COME-TO-AN-END DEPARTMENT

It's with mixed emotions that I report the September issue of *HOT WIRE* will be its last. The bookstores that deal with us will not be surprised to hear the news—in many ways, they were our canaries in the mine this past year. We've tormented them with one problem after another, and they've been patient enough to achieve sainthood. I'll comment at length in the next issue on my decision to stop publication, but for now I assure readers that it isn't primarily motivated by crisis or burnout. There have *always* been financial and operational problems; that goes with the territory when you try to do a cultural project with volunteer labor and no external funding. We've managed to get by and put out a good quality project over the years in spite of the problems. I feel as enthusiastic about women's culture as ever, but it's time for me personally to move on in my life, and thus I must retire *HOT WIRE*. I am making every effort to do this in a responsible and caring way. Readers whose subscriptions haven't expired will be



Sara Wolfersberger

Kathy Najimy (left) is in the forefront of a new breed: the first generation of feminist celebrities who aren't afraid to support the lesbian and gay civil rights movement. (Pictured with 'HOT WIRE' editor Toni Armstrong Jr. at the 1993 March on Washington.) Several articles in this issue explore the issue of lesbian visibility and the mainstreaming of women's music and culture.

offered a sizable list of other periodicals who have been nice enough to offer their hands in friendship to us in this time of need.

BACK ISSUES-O-RAMA

Since Michigan 1994 will be our last festival, we'll have a lot of back issues on hand and no way to market them. We don't have any complete sets, but we do have a good variety of issues from 1987 to present. We are hoping concert producers and touring performers will help us out by taking some to sell. Over the years, we've been careful to print articles that will stand the test of time; most of the material in the back issues still makes for good reading. Help!

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Although the Readers' Choice Awards and Survey results were scheduled to be printed in this issue, I decided to hold off until September so it could be in the final issue. If you didn't get around to sending in your survey, you now have until June 15. (If you already voted, please be honest and don't vote again.) Ballots can be photocopied from the January 1994 (Melissa Etheridge cover) issue, or obtained from us by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope and requesting a Readers' Choice Ballot.

1994 WOMEN'S MUSIC PLUS

It's coming along, slowly but surely. The business crises we've been experiencing here for the last several months delayed production, but the new edition will have more than 4,000 listings. Meanwhile, we have a few 1993 directories left at a

discounted price. Thanks to all who responded to last issue's call for address updates. We got so many responses from our last request, let's try again. We're in search of addresses/phone numbers for the following women and groups. (Let us know if any groups/businesses are defunct)...Alice B. Theatre (Seattle), At the Foot of the Mountain (Minneapolis), Axis Dance, Pam Bailey, Pam Barger, Vivian Berry, Matina Bevis, Caña Brava, The Clothesline Project, Face the Music (radio), Norah Fraser, Barbara Hammer, Herizon Books (Morristown), Helen Holgate, L.A. Hyder, Deborah Jenkins, Joyce Gives Voice (Australia), Kady-Axe Maker to the Queen, Melanie Kaye/Kantrovich, KGAY (Denver), Lambda Literary Awards, Cheri Moraga, Moral Hazard, Odetta, Ova (England), Pam & Maggie, Su Pomerleau, Leslie Raymer, Hania Richmond, Boden Sandstrom, Sappho and the Heartbreakers (Stockholm), Eve Silverman, Snake Sisters (Rochester), Alison Smith (Nashville), Spokane Women's Books, Marianne Thompson/Coffeehouse, Lynn Tibbetts, Edwina Lee Tyler, Womynfire, and Beth York. Finally, please send info on any festivals, gatherings, or concert production companies started during 1993 or 1994.

IN SEARCH OF...

I've been amazed by the volume of responses I receive whenever I run one of these "in search of..." pleas. Now we hope you have...(1) addresses of women who provide music for live events, (2) copies that we can keep of *Virgo Rising*, (3) the early Meg Christian/Cris Williamson 45, and (4) Maxine Feldman's "Angry Atthis." Thanks!

Toni Armstrong Jr., Publisher/Managing Editor

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Mainstream fame comes to this sister on her own terms

KATHY NAJIMY

Interviewed by Toni Armstrong Jr.

When Kathy Najimy (*naJIMMY*) was filming 'Hocus Pocus,' Disney officials asked her to not wear the fake teeth that went with her witch costume—because they wanted to be sure people would know it was her. "I couldn't really imagine a dilemma where people would be sitting there in the dark thinking, 'Hmmm...is that Kathy Najimy or Michelle Pfeiffer?'" she says. But eventually she chose to lose the snaggle teeth, and was presented with a copy of Madonna's 'Sex' book. "I thought it was a kind of cool gift from Disney," says Kathy.

The award-winning actress brought authentic radical feminist culture to the mainstream with 'The Kathy and Mo Show,' a two-woman extravaganza about women's lives and issues. The show, which 'People' magazine called "a blitzkrieg of cutting-edge skits," ran for six years, playing venues in New York, San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Baltimore. Kathy and her partner Maureen Gaffney (host of woman-identified talk shows like Comedy Central's 'Women Aloud!' and 'The Mo Show' on Fox) wrote and starred in this hard-biting, side-splitting production. It was made into a one-hour special on HBO ('The Kathy and Mo Show: Parallel Lives'), which earned two Cable ACE awards in 1992, for Best Special of the Year and Best Performance in a Special.

Kathy's film credits include 'Soapdish' (as Sally Field's costume assistant); 'Hocus Pocus' (as the sister of two other witches, played by Bette Midler and Sara Jessica Parker); and appearances in 'The Fisher King,' 'The Hard Way,' 'Topsy and Bunker,' and Nora Ephron's 'This Is My Life' (with Julie Kavner). Her most famous-to-date performance is, of course, as the relentlessly cheery Sister Mary Patrick in the 1992 box office smash 'Sister Act' (with Whoopi Goldberg and Maggie Smith), and in this year's sequel, 'Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit.'

A native of San Diego (Crawford High, class of '75), Kathy's early theater days included directing the New Image Teen Theater (which she founded for Planned Parenthood), the Rainbow Repertory Theater (in which she was the only white actor), the radical feminist Sisters on Stage troupe, and a one-woman show called 'It's My Party.' In the early days, she supported her theater habit by doing odd jobs, which included delivering singing telegrams. Once, dressed in a furry rabbit suit, she delivered one from herself to her idol, Bette Midler.

Kathy has appeared on many TV shows

and in most of the major entertainment magazines. She has won a variety of awards, including an Obie for acting (in 'Kathy and Mo') and an American Comedy Award for Funniest Supporting Female in a Motion Picture (for 'Sister Act'). She was nominated [in 1993] by Hollywood Women's Press Club for Female Discovery of the Year (along with Marisa Tomei, Angela Bassett, and Rosie Perez), and has received a second nomination from the American Comedy Awards for her performance in 'Sister Act 2.' Readers of 'HOT WIRE' selected her as one of their favorite mainstream performers in the 1992 Readers' Choice survey.

She directed the off-Broadway musical revue 'Back to Bacharach and David' last year in New York and hopes the show will have a run in Los Angeles in 1994. This year, she stars in 'In Search of Dr. Seuss' for TNT, which also features Eileen Brennan and Robin Williams.

Never one to mince words, Kathy's opening compliment to Jay Leno on a 'Tonight' show appearance was: "You're one of the only talk-show hosts who isn't racist, sexist, homophobic, and doesn't think with your penis."

YOU'RE AS POLITICAL AS YOU ARE HILARIOUS. TELL US ABOUT THE KATHY AND MO SHOW.

We wrote *The Kathy and Mo Show* in 1984. We first did it in San Diego at a 200-seat theater called the Old Town Opera House. Mo and I produced it and directed it ourselves, with the help of our sisters Mona and Colleen and our friends.

HOW LONG WAS ITS INITIAL RUN?

It was supposed to play only two nights. We didn't think anyone would like it. But as it turned out, *everyone* liked it. Now people are doing *Kathy and Mo* all over the United States. They're buying the script, getting the rights. We saw it performed in L.A. with a ten-person cast once. I've seen videos from Boston, Seattle, and Arizona.

HOW'D YOU GET THE NEW YORK GIG?

Well, we extended it for ten weekends in San Diego. We did it at a lesbian bar called The Flame and at the Old Globe Theatre. I moved to New York in September of 1985, and booked us into the back room of a bar called Don't Tell Mama. Mo came to New York a month later, and we performed it

there—and then for a summer at The Second Stage, which is a little off-Broadway house run by two women.

THEN CAME AN EIGHTEEN MONTH RUN OFF-BROADWAY AT THE WEST-SIDE ARTS THEATRE THAT BEGAN IN 1989, RIGHT? AND THE HBO SPECIAL CAME OUT OF THAT?

Yeah. In fact, HBO was part producer of the off-Broadway run. The special itself was filmed in San Francisco.

HOW DID YOU HOOK UP WITH MO? YOU WERE BOTH FROM SAN DIEGO...?

We met through some common friends. I had seen her in an improv group [Hot Flashes], and I thought she was the funniest one. At the time I was directing—that's what I did before acting, and I still do it—and we discussed me directing her in a one-woman show. As we went through her characters, my characters kind of came out. I said, "Let's take like a month off of our projects and do this show that no one will think is funny but us..." and that was that. We were especially nervous about the reaction from the women's community.

WHY?

Because we did this piece called "Sister Woman Sister," and we thought it might really offend the lesbian population in town. We've always been supported by the gay community; at that time, it was about fifty percent of our audience. We thought they'd be offended because "Sister Woman Sister" satirizes feminist/lesbian poetry. But they loved it—*loved* it. The piece was sort of a nod to the women's movement and to the lesbian movement. You can't really satirize something until it comes to pass—until it's recognized as legitimately existing. I was really proud that we could sort of skewer the feminist movement and have people get it. Because that meant that it was *there*, and people acknowledged it. You can't do jokes about [madam] Heidi Fleiss until she's famous.

UP TO THAT POINT, HOW MUCH INVOLVEMENT DID YOU HAVE WITH THE FEMINIST CULTURAL SCENE?

A lot. I've been a feminist since I can remember, although I've never been into the wom-

en's music festival scene. Actually, I started seeing Mo as a performer when I ran an all-woman coffeehouse/performance space in San Diego called The Wing Cafe. The owners who hired me to be the emcee and to book the acts decided they only wanted women performers—not something that I terribly agreed with at the time, but since I was hired, that's what I did. As a result, I got to hang out with a lot of talent from L.A. and San Diego, and it was so much fun—I really loved it. On Friday nights we had amateur night, and on Saturdays we had the professionals that I'd booked. I met women from L.A., like the talented writer Jane Anderson [HBO's *The Positively True Adventures of the Alleged Texas Cheerleader-Murdering Mom* starring Holly Hunter, *Cop Tips Waitress*] and a lot of great women stand-ups and musicians. In fact, Wing Cafe wanted a women's improv group, so I called up Mo and asked her to get some women together, which is how Hot Flashes started. Anyway, that was my involvement with women's culture, other than being in feminist theater and taking women's studies.

TURE WITHOUT TRULY MOCKING OR DENIGRATING IT. A LOT OF THE BRILLIANCE OF SATIRE COMES FROM THE PERTINENT DETAILS THAT ARE INCLUDED. HOW DID YOU SELECT THE MUSIC, OUTFITS, ETC. FOR KATHY AND MO?

Mo and I wrote everything, and we picked all the music. The show's content was directly from our experiences. Because of Wing Cafe, I had known "womyn" who were into Holly Near and Cris Williamson. Also, Sisters on Stage included a lot of radicals and many really good subjects to satirize—like women who change their names from Peterson to Petersdaughter.

IS POLITICAL THEATER SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO DO MORE OF?

Yes, it is. I'm finding, though, that the more known I get, the more impact I can have in other ways. When I was doing Sisters on Stage, it was really radical, but we were performing primarily for radical feminists who didn't need to hear it. But now I can do a nun movie that's simply funny, and it results

about AIDS and choice—it's great. In a way I'm more politically effective now than I was when my whole life revolved solely around radical politics, because now it affords me listeners in the *millions*. People really listen now, because they know me from the movies. Speaking from an artistic viewpoint, I want the films I'm in and the plays I direct this year and next year to have a little more substance than the kinds of things I've been doing. But I also realize that *because* I did the things I did, I'm much more powerful politically.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE SMALL-SCALE WOMAN-IDENTIFIED CULTURAL ACTIVITIES THAT ARE BEING DONE? IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE IN A MAINSTREAM POSITION BECAUSE YOU CAN REACH SO MANY MORE PEOPLE, OF COURSE, BUT...

...oh, I think they are both equally valuable, and I certainly don't think you can trade one for the other. I will always have both in my life. Writing my own shows and doing non-mainstream stuff gives me a chance to be uncensored, to say the things I want to in the ways I want to say them, and not have to worry about box office. Plus you need support from within your own group. Music festivals and theater festivals, speakers and benefits...all the things that are part of your life contribute to who you are. In my case, one enables me to do the other. I don't mean for it to sound like, "Now I'm this big star and I only want to do movies 'cause more people will listen to me." I know I became who I am through the other.

SO MANY OF OUR READERS DEVOTE ENERGY TO WOMEN-ONLY CREATIVE ENDEAVORS. THERE'S BEEN A CONSTANT, PERVASIVE MEDIA ATTACK ON THESE ACTIVITIES AS BEING NOT LEGITIMATE OR WORTHWHILE—SOMETIMES EVEN IN THE GAY AND ALTERNATIVE PRESS.

But they *are* legitimate. You need to get inspired, to get refueled, by being with other people who feel the same way that you do. It's why you have a party with your friends instead of with strangers. It's not that strangers aren't wonderful to meet, but you have a party with your friends to regroup and get support and remember who you are, so you can go out into the world and deal with the strangers. The fact that I got to do a lot of woman-oriented things taught me a lot. I had questions; I thought I was the only one. I wasn't sure if it was okay to feel the way that I felt. You go out there and—let's face it—most of the world doesn't agree with how we feel.



Adam Jahiel

Kathy Najimy (left) and Mo Gaffney brought their hit stage act to TV when HBO aired *The Kathy and Mo Show: Parallel Lives*.

WHAT ABOUT SISTERS ON STAGE?

I was in Sisters on Stage—which was an all-woman, grassroots feminist theater group—during my San Diego State college days, 1975-1980.

ALISON BECHDEL DOES THE SAME THING CARTOON-WISE THAT THE KATHY AND MO SHOW DID THEATRICALY—SATIRIZING FEMINIST CUL-

ture in me going on *Arsenio* talking about the Gay and Lesbian March on Washington. Now I can be in a book that talks about pro-choice issues. I get on TV with Leno, Dennis Miller, Phil Donahue; I do interviews in *The New York Times*, in the *L.A. Times*—and there's not one medium in which I avoid talking about politics. In fact, I just opened a newspaper and saw the headline "Comedian Can't Break Political Habit." The article talks

AND NOT EVERYONE CAN SUCCEED IN THE MAINSTREAM INDUSTRY. HOW MANY TALENTED PEOPLE ARE EVER GOING TO GET A PERFORMING VEHICLE IF THEY DON'T DO IT THEMSELVES, AT LEAST TO BEGIN WITH?

One line that would describe my career: I engineered it myself. Other people helped, of course, but I was the one who decided this was worth doing; I provided my own motivation. I wasn't going to wait for some producer—who we're supposed to think knows more than us, or has better taste than us—to choose me, because that would never have happened. I had to say, "Okay, what do I believe in? What do I do best?" and try to make it happen for myself. A few people are luckier than that—they just get chosen really quickly and don't have to go through all that. But I believe "you can do anything you want to do as long as you're willing to get up and do it." That's a line we have in *The Kathy and Mo Show*, and it's very cliché and sort of Hallmark card-ish, but it's *true*. You can do anything you want to do as long as you're willing to get up and do it—especially if it's something that other people are not encouraging you to do. Especially something that's on the edge or controversial.

AT THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON, YOU GAVE PRO-GAY RIGHTS INTERVIEWS, SAYING, "OF COURSE I'M HERE TO SUPPORT THIS; I WAS POLITICAL BEFORE I WAS AN ACTRESS." THAT'S AN UNUSUAL POSITION FOR CELEBRITIES TO TAKE. TRADITIONALLY, THE PERCEPTION HAS BEEN THAT CAREER DAMAGE COULD BE SEVERE. MOST FAMOUS PEOPLE HAVEN'T BEEN WILLING TO RISK ASSOCIATION WITH THE GAY/LESBIAN OR FEMINIST COMMUNITIES.

You know, I may be so naïve—Hollywood may in fact be huddling and having meetings about "that radical Kathy Najimy" and saying things like "don't give her that part, because when she goes on talk shows or when she does interviews she'll talk about things that we don't want her to talk about." I don't know about it if it happens—I don't really *want* to know about it. I've done all these Touchstone Disney movies, and I think they quake in their boots every time I go on a television show. They certainly have an image to uphold, which I respect, but I also have the impulse—and the freedom—as a human to talk about the things that are important to me. So, you know, maybe I'd be more famous if I'd just shut up. But I don't really care to. That's not the kind of life that fulfills me. There may be people who don't want to work with me or be connected with

me because of my beliefs, but you know, bless them and release them; let them do their thing and I'll do mine. Bye bye to them.

WOMEN ARE OFTEN SET UP TO COMPETE RATHER THAN COOPERATE, AND THAT'S CERTAINLY TRUE IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. YOU'VE SAID YOU DON'T LIKE IT WHEN REVIEWERS CALL YOU A "SCENE-STEALER" BY WAY OF PRAISING YOUR ACTING SKILL AND PRESENCE.

I'm flattered when my work is praised, and I acknowledge that saying I "stole the scene" is intended as a standard showbiz compliment. But I wish they'd use another phrase. I don't like it when they say "steal the scene" or "steal the focus" because that makes it sound like I did something that's in competition with the other actresses. I don't think that's a compliment. People are so quick to want to separate women.

IS THERE ANY MOVEMENT WITHIN THE INDUSTRY TOWARD COOPERATION BETWEEN WOMEN?

With certain individuals there is, but I haven't seen a major united movement. There's something going on that I do want to talk about, though. There are women directors who are very successful—women I admire, who inspire me, and whom I look up to. But it's really getting me angry the way some of them are handling themselves. Because I direct, I get excited when I read an article about another woman director. But then they say things like, "I don't want to be interviewed as a *woman* director, I just want to be interviewed as a director," or "I'm not necessarily feminist," or "I know my movie was feminist, but it was just the *story* I cared about...."

WHY DO THEY DO THIS?

So they can stay in the game longer? So they can seem more appealing? So they can get more jobs—I don't know what. Maybe it's just an ignorance of conscience, but it bothers me when they say, "No, I haven't met with any sexism or oppression; I don't need to identify with the women's movement." That really pisses me off, because I don't care how rich they are or how many contacts they have—the reason those women are successful is because of the women's movement. There are things that can help them—they can be the sister of someone famous, or be terribly wealthy, or sleep with someone, or whatever it is that they want to attribute their advancement to—but in my mind they're successful because of their talent, their skill, their intelligence, *and the women's movement* that paved the way.

AH YES, WE'RE IN THE "POST FEMINIST" ERA.

Yeah, right—like it's something that's *over*. I can understand not wanting to be singled out as a woman, because a director is a director. But until we are equal—which we are nowhere near—we need to qualify ourselves, we need to give credit, and we need to inspire other women. I think successful women should stand up, and the first thing they should say—the most important thing that they should say—is "I am feminist." And I'm talking now about some women who *are*, not the women who aren't, you know what I mean? And there's also another sort of trendy thing going on, which is for celebrities to say they're "politically incorrect..."

...OH, DON'T YOU JUST HATE THAT?

I *hate* it.

IT'S ALWAYS GOTTEN MY GOAT, AND YOU'LL NOTICE THE TERM RARELY APPEARS IN *HOT WIRE*. I REMEMBER HEARING "POLITICALLY CORRECT" AND "POLITICALLY INCORRECT" IN WOMEN'S MUSIC CIRCLES AS EARLY AS THE MID-1970s. THE MAINSTREAM HAS ONLY RECENTLY LATCHED ONTO IT. BEING "P.I." HAS ALWAYS MEANT YOU'RE REINFORCING THE STATUS QUO—AND THEN PRETENDING YOU ARE REVOLUTIONARY FOR "STANDING UP TO" THE PEOPLE WHO POINT OUT OPPRESSION. BEING POLITICALLY INCORRECT ALWAYS MEANS MAKING A RACIST OR SEXIST JOKE, OR DOING SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO HURT SOMEONE'S FEELINGS...

...always! Absolutely! What's wrong with being politically correct? It's *important*. And there are a lot of people who are hypocrites; on the one hand they ask for tolerance and respect for something they support politically, and in the next sentence they'll say they're politically incorrect—you can do anything, it doesn't matter, anything's funny, there are no rules. Well, that's bullshit. There *are* limits, and there *are* boundaries. There's enough funny and interesting material in the world that we don't need to break those boundaries, or like you say, to be hurting people's feelings.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS FOR YOU AS A FUNNY ENTERTAINER?

Well, as an actress, if I write my own material it's going to come from my heart and my mind—and in my heart and my mind I try to be politically correct, so it's not a matter of censoring myself. I hope I would never write or want to perform something that would be offensive or hurt someone's feel-

ings or perpetuate hate in any way. I hope it would just never come out of my pen.

WHEN FACED WITH A SCRIPT LIKE *HOCUS POCUS*, WHERE THERE WOULD BE SOME CONCERNS ABOUT THE PORTRAYAL OF WITCHES...

...ah, *Hocus Pocus* was an interesting journey for me. In the end, the whole thing actually turned out to be really cool politically—I'll tell you what happened. I got the script and I wasn't interested, first of all because I thought it just wasn't a good script, and also because of its portrayal of all witches as evil. But then I found out that Bette Midler was attached to it—she's been my idol for my whole life. I always thought if I ever had a chance to work with Bette Midler, I'd probably be like serving her dinner at a function or something, you know? But to be able to star with her in a movie was so...tempting for me. But there *was* the problem of the script. I went to Gloria Steinem and asked her what she thought. She told me that the first witches were health care workers who performed abortions, and that's where the notion of baby eating came in: Women would go in pregnant and come out not, and so those health care workers were accused of killing or eating the babies. I went to the

DID YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCE?

They told me to rewrite this one part where a teacher is talking to the class. So I wrote this great scene—it wasn't didactic, wasn't hitting anybody over the head, it was just two lines, something like, "Too bad those Sanderson sisters have to spoil it for the rest of the witches." The movie people were fine with that. But then I didn't work for two weeks, and when I came back I discovered they'd filmed the classroom scene as it was before I rewrote it. So I kept having meetings with the director, Kenny Ortega, who was supportive. He met with the real-life head witch in Salem and told her my concerns, so she could let her whole group [Wicca] know that there was somebody on the set *caring*. Finally, I wrote letters to all the producers, and kept copies so it would be on record that I'd done everything that I could.

AND WHAT HAPPENED?

Witches protested. But along with that, many of the networks—even CNN—had footage of me talking about how offensive it was. So in a way, the witch movement got more good publicity than it ever has. I don't tend to know a lot about witch rights, but I know that the whole thing about baby eating and Satan and evil is based in a very rich

was nice, because it could have gone the other way, and then I would have felt really bad about it.

AND YOU GOT TO WORK WITH BETTE MIDLER, WHO'S CERTAINLY UNCONVENTIONALLY FUNNY AND OUTRAGEOUS LIKE YOU CAN BE. YOU OCCASIONALLY WORE PROVOCATIVE UNDERWEAR UNDER YOUR SISTER MARY PATRICK HABIT, DID YOU NOT? DO YOU HAVE OTHER SISTER ACT ANECDOTES THAT *HOT WIRE* READERS MIGHT ESPECIALLY APPRECIATE?

Here's one—we shot part of the first *Sister Act* in Reno. At the casino where we were filming, we had hotel rooms that we were using as trailers between scenes. I was visiting Wendy Makkena—who played the little nun, Sister Mary Robert—in her room. We were in our nun outfits, playing around with the pay TV channels, and she was smoking. While waiting for room service, we were flipping around the channels and an adult erotic station came on—featuring two women. Right as we flipped it on, room service came to the door. Wendy went to shut the TV off, and I said, "Don't you dare! Don't you touch that!" So the room service guy came in. Keep in mind this was before



© Touchstone Pictures

Kathy Najimy (left) as one of the Sanderson sisters in *Hocus Pocus* (with Bette Midler and Sara Jessica Parker). The actress crusaded in the media to get out the message that contrary to the images portrayed in the film, witches are real and they're not all evil. In *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*, Deloris VanCartier—alias Sister Mary Clarence (Whoopi Goldberg)—joins her old friends Sister Mary Patrick (Kathy Najimy) and Sister Mary Robert (Wendy Makkena) to pump new life into the inner-city St. Francis High School.

director and the producers with my concerns. I asked them if we could at least make a reference in this "fairy tale adventure" to the fact that the Sanderson sisters are bad fairy tale witches, but that there are real witches in the world—and they certainly aren't all evil.

sexism. I got to have a national forum again—the *Today* show with Jane Pauley, *Arsenio*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Us* magazine, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The New York Times*...By my making what originally seemed like a politically incorrect choice, still we got some air time and some good focus on the issue. It

people knew about *Sister Act*. He wheeled in our food; looked at me lying on the bed in my nun drag watching; looked at the two women on the TV; looked at her smoking. She signed the bill, and he just said, "Thank you, thank you so much," and left.

continued on page 50

SOAPBOX

Letters From Readers

One interesting thing about your interview with Melissa Etheridge [January 1994] was the progression of photos of Melissa from 1988 to 1993. Madonna is the hands-down queen of inventing and re-inventing her own image—we've watched her do it over the years to the delight, bafflement, or outrage of the critics. The ability to change with the times and keep presenting interesting images of yourself to the public is one of the things all successful entertainers must do. To be able to do it on one's own terms is a gift the women's movement has given the American female performer. It's nice to have a star like Melissa validate that and embrace the term "feminist."

Eileen Callahan, New York City

.....

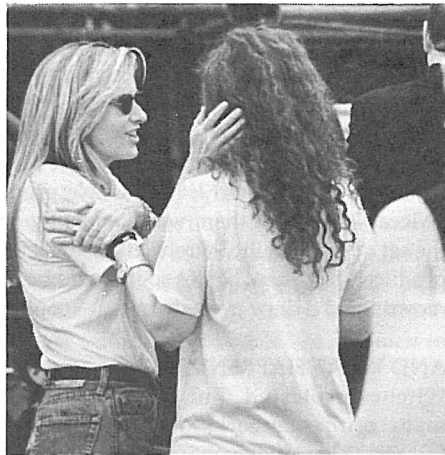
My hat off to your photographers, as I have been taking note of some fine photography in your most recent issues. For example, Toni Armstrong Jr.'s photo of June Millington in the January issue was taken at a wonderful "decisive moment." Live photography in general is very difficult, and usually we are dealing with problems beyond our control. Your photographers seem to be mastering the art. It is always such a pleasure to watch women's development! My own development has recently taken a turn into the field of video, with the first project being *Country Western Dance With Donna E*, a wonderful and well-known instructor based in Seattle. It was ambitious for a first endeavor, but it was a pleasure to learn so much on such a fun project. Anyway, congratulations on your constant growth. May we continue to witness each other's transformation for years to come.

Irene Young, Oakland

.....

I want to let readers know about a company I'm boycotting. Just Like the Master, a CD/tape duplication facility has refused service to The Rhythm Method, a lesbian a cappella group, because of the lesbian content of their lyrics. This refusal came after negotiations had already started, leaving

LETTERS may be edited for clarity and/or length. Send to SOAPBOX/HOT WIRE, 5210 N. Wayne, Chicago, IL 60640.



Toni Armstrong Jr.

To be able to reinvent one's public image on one's own terms is a gift the women's movement has given the American female performer. "It's nice to have a star like Melissa validate that and embrace the term feminist," writes a reader. (Melissa Etheridge at the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, pictured with Bitsy Ziff of the trio BETTY.)

The Rhythm Method with the added work of finding another manufacturer at the last minute. If you're a performer, don't use the services of this company, and tell them why. Even if you're not in the recording business, you can tell this company why their homophobia is hurtful and dangerous. Contact Dale Schmidt, Just Like the Master, 960 E. 8th Ave., Broomfield, CO 80020. (800) 633-5006, fax (303) 466-6799.

Jamie Anderson, Tucson

.....

My partner and I are both avid readers of your publications and are very grateful for all of your efforts to liberate and to inform the gay and lesbian community. Nonetheless, as lesbians residing in North Carolina, we are forcibly closeted and feel that we are drowning in heterosexual culture and oppression. Consequently, we have recently decided to make a painful—albeit necessary—move to a more "friendly" state with better job security; New York maybe. I am an English teacher in the public schools and my partner is in an equally risky employment situation. We have allowed ourselves until June 1997 to make the move. I am finding myself not in just

an ordinary closet but in a steadily shrinking SHOEBOX! My partner feels the same way and we need your help. Does anyone out there in reader (or editor) land have any suggestions for us? I am also extremely interested in pursuing a serious career as an activist. I need to know how to get involved, who to call, etc. Please send advice, information, and/or friendly suggestions. Thank you so much for your help and discretion.

Boxholder, P.O. Box 903, Mebane, NC 27302.

Editor's note: Several back issues of 'HOT WIRE' include detailed descriptions of various locales. Check out "The San Francisco Bay Area: Is It the 'Mecca' for Lesbian Feminist Culture?" (November 1986), "Women's Culture in Ohio" (September 1989), "The Washington, D.C. Women's Community" (January 1990), "Feminist Music in the Largest State: Alaska" (May 1991), "Hotlanta: A Stroll Through the Women's Communities of Atlanta" (September 1991), and "Our Kind of Town: Chicago" (September 1992). While we're at it, there's a list with descriptions of women's music festivals in the May 1992 issue. Some of the above articles are in issues that are still available for sale; others will have to be obtained through our reprints service.

.....

I have long been a fan of *HOT WIRE* (when I can get hold of it in this country). I am in the process of establishing an archive and resource center for the British organization Women in Music. *HOT WIRE* is obviously an essential resource for our project. We produce a quarterly newsletter with reviews, interviews, articles, listings, etc. We are in the process of establishing a biannual journal which will concentrate on articles, interviews and in-depth reviews with a more frequent bulletin of listings and other communications to members. We would like to hear from anyone who is interested in what we're doing.

Sophie Fuller

*Women in Music Archive
and Resource Centre Project*

*81 Tivoli Road
London SE27 OEE
England*

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Lesbian chic is nothing new. (1903 sheet music cover courtesy of Ralph Judd's Drag-Time Archives). See article on page 32 in this issue for a discussion of contemporary lesbian chic and the mainstreaming of women's culture.

Rhythm Fest
1994

the largest women's festival in the South!

Come join us Labor Day Weekend (Sept. 1-3) for our gala fifth anniversary on our very private new land in Tuxedo, NC. Call 404.873.1551 for information!

HOTLINE

Compiled by Jeni Hamilton, Annie Lee, and Toni Armstrong Jr.

TRIVIA

Anne Francis played a prototype feminist private detective in the 1965 TV show *HONEY WEST*. Skilled at judo and karate, she owned a weapons arsenal full of amazing devices (a la James Bond), including a specially modified lipstick with a radio transmitter. A single career woman, the love of Honey West's life was her pet ocelot. Winner: Jackie Willie, Normal, Illinois.

We finally have winners to the **ROSEANNE CONNER'S JOBS** trivia contest. Readers reminded us of jobs we'd forgotten; she actually had ten instead of seven. Not listed in chronological order: (1) Wellman's Plastics Factory assembly-line worker, (2) Lobo Lounge bartender/waitress, (3) shampoo girl/gofer at beauty parlor, (4) magazine telemarketer, (5) mall Santa, (6) secretary at husband Dan's construction company, (7) fast food chicken place worker, (8) waitress at Rodbell's mall luncheonette, (9) co-owner of motorcycle shop with Dan, and, currently, (10) co-owner with family members of the Lanford Lunch Box restaurant (specialty: loose meat sandwiches). Winners this time are Beth Zeiger (San Antonio), Beth McMurtery (Needham, Mass.), and Bonnie Mazur (Menominee, Mich.). They will each get a copy of the 1994 *Women's Music Plus Directory*. Thanks to Bonnie Morris for the idea, and all praise to reruns.

Final trivia contest: Who was the first African American person to appear on TV?

NEWS

The **BARBIE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION** (BLO) claims responsibility for a series of "terrorist attacks" last Christmas. According to *Outlines*, they secretly altered more than 300 dolls, swapping computer chips in the voice boxes. In more than forty states (as well as in Canada and England), kids got queenly G.I. Joe Battle Commanders saying things like, "I love to shop with

HOTLINE presents capsule reports of past happenings, announces upcoming events, and passes on various tidbits of info. This column is dedicated to Donna Allen, who has given a great deal of her life to facilitating and promoting the type of connections between women that "Hotline" is all about.



From the unsinkable amazon department: On the morning of the L.A. earthquake last January, Lily Tomlin was waiting for a limo driver to take her to a *Good Morning America* TV interview. When he never showed, she got out her tools, fixed her garage—which had been damaged in the quake—and drove herself. (After all that, the interview was canceled.)

you" and "Let's sing with the band tonight." The Barbies got to use their new and improved butch voices to snarl, among other things, "Vengeance is mine" and "Dead men tell no lies."

Nightlines reports that *Newsweek's* top-selling issue of 1993 was the June 21 edition with **LESBIANS ON THE COVER**....After hearing numerous reports of sexual assaults on women at police stations perpetrated by male officers, Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto announced the opening of the country's **FIRST POLICE STATION STAFFED ENTIRELY BY WOMEN**.

Since voters of Cincinnati voted against Issue 3, which repealed the section of **CINCINNATI'S HUMAN RIGHTS ORDINANCE** that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, GLMA/ACT UP has begun a boycott of Cincinnati's tourist industry, including the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the hospitality industry....**UNITED AIRLINES ADDED SEXUAL ORIENTATION TO THE NON-DISCRIMINATION CLAUSE** in its Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy

effective January 1, 1994, reports *Deneuve*. Gay and Lesbian United Employees (GLUE) helped to bring about the change.

According to *Women's Sports and Fitness*, the Honduras government has issued a stamp featuring **JENNY PALACIOS DE STILLO**. This cross-country skier is the first and only Winter Olympian from Honduras.... **WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY** will be a full-medal event in the 1998 Winter Olympics. Three women's events will be added as full-medal events in the 1996 summer games—**MOUNTAIN BIKING, BEACH VOLLEYBALL, and SOCCER**.

WOMEN

Two weeks after **TONI MORRISON** received the Nobel Prize for Literature, her New York home burned. The Christmas day fire destruction included the loss of her original manuscripts and drafts, including all of her early work. She had promised to donate the documents to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

The January 28 issue of *Entertainment Weekly* included two pages on **BIKINI KILL, RIOT GRRRLS**, and Velvet Underground's **MAUREEN TUCKER** ("who was a riot grrrl back when the word girl still had a vowel")....**MARGA GOMEZ** looked hot in her full-page photo in the fall 1993 special edition of *TIME* on multiculturalism ("The New Face of America"). Marga also got good reviews for her participation in Comic Relief VI, co-hosted by **WHOOPI GOLDBERG**, which raised more than \$6.4 million for health care for homeless people.

After appearing in the now-famous eyebrow-raising *Vanity Fair* photo spread with **K.D. LANG**, supermodel **CINDY CRAWFORD** dressed herself in drag in the December 23 issue of *Rolling Stone*....According to *People*, **OPRAH WINFREY** celebrated her fortieth birthday last January at L'Orangerie in L.A., followed by a women's slumber party with celebrity friends and old pals at the Hotel Bel-Air.

BARBRA STREISAND's smash New Year's show at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas opened the door for her to return to live

performing this year. She could break all records on tour; in addition to her reported \$20 million paycheck, the MGM audiences paid more than \$1 million for shirts, jackets, mugs, and other concert-related souvenirs.

Last January, Supreme Court Justice **SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR** became the first woman to join the previously male-only Alfalfa Club in Washington, DC. Sandra's guest First Lady **HILLARY CLINTON** was in attendance at the official breaking of the gender barrier....**CAROLYN HUNTOON** has been named director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston. According to *USA Today*, she is the first woman to hold such a position at any space center....National Gay and Lesbian Task Force news: **PERI JUDE RADECIC** has replaced **TORIE OSBORNE** as the executive director, and **BETSY GRESSLER** (former president of Stonewall Cincinnati) was appointed organizing director.

Watch for **MIDORI ITO** (Japan) in professional women's ice skating. She is successfully performing the difficult triple axle, a jump that has traditionally only been done by male skaters....Tennis star **JENNIFER CAPRIATI** has retired (at the age of seventeen) from the sport indefinitely. According to *TIME*, she "plans to be a kid, live out of the limelight, and forget all about her sport for awhile."

FOND FAREWELLS

MYRNA LOY, "Queen of the Movies" in the late '30s, died in New York City last November. The movie star, who received an honorary Academy Award in 1991, was best known for her roles as Nora Charles in *The Thin Man* films....**JANET MARGOLIN**, fifty, best known for her starring roles in *David and Lisa* (1962) and Woody Allen's *Take the Money and Run* (1969), died of ovarian cancer this winter in Los Angeles.

Legendary gospel singer **WILLIE MAE FORD SMITH** passed on last winter at the age of eighty-nine. "Mother Smith" was featured in the 1992 documentary *Say Amen, Somebody*....Philanthropist **ALICE TULLY** died last December at the age of ninety-one. She used her inherited fortune to support the arts, and funded construction of Alice Tully Hall at New York's Lincoln Center.... Goodbye to **ADELAIDE HALL**, who passed on last November at the age of ninety-two in London. The singer rose to international prominence performing with Duke Ellington; she introduced "Don't Get Around Anymore" and "Sophisticated Lady."

Champion cyclist **MARY JANE REOCH** was biking in Dallas last September when she had a fatal collision with a vehicle. According to *Women's Sports and Fitness*, more than 700 mourners attended her memorial service. A fund has been established to erect a statue in the park where the accident occurred, in an attempt to raise public consciousness about cyclist/motorist safety. Reoch Memorial Fund, c/o Landry Center, 411 N. Washington #2000, Dallas, TX 75246.

BARBARA SHELLEY has left Rhino Records. She can be reached now at W3 Public Relations, 8380 Melrose Ave. #105, Los Angeles, CA 90069. (213) 852-1043....Fiddler **BARBARA LAMB**, who released a solo album this year on Sugar Hill Records, has left the band Ranch Romance and has relocated from Seattle to Nashville....*Kinesis* reports that the Canada-based women's **PRESS GANG PRINTERS** in Vancouver has closed shop after twenty-three years.

HONORS-ACHIEVEMENTS

MOUNTAIN MOVING COFFEEHOUSE FOR WOMYN AND CHILDREN was inducted into the Chicago 1993 Lesbian and Gay Hall of Fame. Mountain Moving is the oldest continuously operating lesbian feminist entertainment coffeehouse in the world. Still run by a collective, MMCH produces more than twenty-five shows per year, and will begin its twentieth year in September. It's open most Saturday nights. To get on the mailing list or to send press kits: MMCH, 5008 N. Sheridan Blvd., Box 409159, Chicago, IL 60640. (312) 754-7068.

JOELLE ATTINGER is *TIME* magazine's first-ever female top editor. She began her career with the newsweekly in 1973 as a secretary in the Paris-based Europe bureau. As chief of correspondents, she now oversees sixty-three reporters deployed in twenty-nine cities around the world.

Entertainment Weekly's list of top twelve Entertainers of the Year included **K.D. LANG**, **WHITNEY HOUSTON**, **HOLLY HUNTER**, **EMMA THOMPSON**, and **SHANNEN DOHERTY**....Rookies of the Year included **LAURA ESQUIVEL** (*Like Water For Chocolate*), singing trio **SWV (SISTERS WITH VOICES)**, and vocalist **TONI BRAXTON**....The magazine singled out **K.D. LANG**, **HOLLY HUNTER's** *Ada* (*The Piano*), **BRETT BUTLER's** *Grace Under Fire*, network news anchor **CONNIE CHUNG**, and **EMMA THOMPSON's** character portrayals as "one step forward" for women.... Jane Campion's *THE PIANO* was selected

Movie of the Year, with the Angela Bassett/Tina Turner vehicle *WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT* coming in at number eight....**ROSEANNE** and Jane Anderson's *THE POSITIVELY TRUE ADVENTURES OF THE ALLEGED TEXAS CHEERLEADER-MURDERING MOM* (HBO) made the Best TV list....Laura Esquivel's *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE* and Patricia Cornwell's *CRUEL & UNUSUAL* made the top ten books list....and **ROSEANNE CASH** was the only woman to make their music list.

According to *Forbes*, **OPRAH WINFREY** has replaced Bill Cosby as the top-earning celebrity. Combined income from her many entertainment endeavors for 1993 added up to a whopping \$50 million.

Movie producer **CHRISTINE VACHON** was awarded the 1994 Frameline Award for significant achievement in lesbian and gay media arts....The Rhythm and Blues Foundation last March honored **MABEL JOHN**, **IRMA THOMAS**, **SHIRLEY REEVES**, **DORIS C. K. JACKSON**, and (from the Shirelles) **BEVERLY LEE**.

Congratulations to: Chicago's *NIGHTLINES* on their 200th issue....and **BARB BARTON** for receiving the Detroit Music Award for Best Vocalist in Folk Music....and **JUDITH RODIN**, the first woman to become president of an Ivy League university. (She's holding office at her old alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, class of '66)....and **MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS**, 103, recent recipient of the Medal of Freedom. Described by President Clinton as one of the "greatest reformers of the century," Marjory's activism over the years has included the women's suffrage movement and the fight to save the Florida Everglades.

Chemist **RACHEL FULLER BROWN** and bacteriologist **ELIZABETH LEE HAZEN**, who created the first antibiotic against fungal disease, were posthumously inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in Akron, Ohio....Thanks to Endeavor astronaut **KATHRYN (K.T.) THORNTON** for her part in fixing the nearsighted Hubble Space Telescope last December.

TIME magazine named screenwriter-novelist Laura Esquivel's *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE* one of the Top Ten Films of 1993. ("Home cooking is the sorcery of the oppressed," writes *TIME*. "In this sprawling banquet of a romantic Mexican melodrama, forbidden love finds the recipe for fulfillment....")

Jane Anderson's *TEXAS CHEERLEADER-MURDERING MOM* (HBO) was named the number one TV show of 1993....**ELLA FITZGERALD** and **EMMYLOU HARRIS** were the only two women in the Top Ten Music Acts....The Top Ten Sports list included tennis great **STEFFI GRAF** and **WANG JUNXIA** and her running teammates, who shattered world records in the Chinese National Games in Beijing.

Money is being raised for a **MONUMENT TO HONOR ELEANOR ROOSEVELT**. Eleanor Roosevelt Monument Fund, 5 Riverside Dr. #17-A, New York, NY 10023.

ANNIVERSARIES

TWENTY YEARS: The **NATIONAL WOMEN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL**, the longest-running feminist cultural festival; special 1994 events include the world premiere of a new work by Kay Gardner (100-voice choir, forty-piece orchestra) honoring the stages of a woman's life....The **FEMINIST BOOKSHOP** (Sydney, Australia), **FAN THE FLAMES** (Columbus), **NEW WORDS** (Cambridge), **PEOPLE'S BOOKS** (Milwaukee), and **FOOD FOR THOUGHT** (Amherst)....and the group **INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF WOMEN COMPOSERS**.

FIFTEEN YEARS: **IOWA WOMAN** and **MANUSHI** journal (New Delhi, India).... booking agency/festival producer **ROADWORK**....the **NATIONAL GAY YOUTH NETWORK**....Berkeley's **THIRD WOMAN PRESS**....the **WOMEN'S MUSIC ARCHIVES**....engineer **LESLIE ANN JONES**.... **KITKA** chorus....**WOMONWRITES** (Southeast Lesbian Writers' Conference).... **WOMEN & CHILDREN FIRST** (Chicago)....character actress **JUDITH SLOAN**.

TEN YEARS: Erotic magazine **ON OUR BACKS**....**CAMPFEST**....**URBAN BUSH WOMEN** dance troupe....the **LESBIAN ART MOVEMENT SHOWS**....**TAPESTRY SINGERS** chorus (Austin)....the **BOSTON WOMEN'S THEATRE FESTIVAL**....**WOMEN IN BROADCAST TECHNOLOGY**.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Anybody can have sex with anything," said **ROSEANNE ARNOLD** in the February *Vanity Fair*. "The person you're having it with doesn't do anything to make you one way or the other." In the same interview, she explained her views on the legalization of prostitution....Author **SARAH SCHULMAN** stated in an interview with *Windy City Times* that being a lesbian is defined principally in two ways. "One way is that

you hate men and the other is that you want to be a man. Therefore, you can only exist in relation to men."

"I have memories as a child of being in a car with my parents...there was a sign in front of a restaurant, and it said **NO DOGS OR JEWS ALLOWED**," said Supreme Court Justice **RUTH BADER GINSBURG** in the October *Vogue*...."I want them to live from a place of strength, not be victims of rage, sadness, and pain," says **MELANIE DEMORE** in the *Redwood Newsletter*, discussing why she works with the Oakland Youth Chorus. "I want them to have pride in their culture, no matter what that culture is. As an African American woman, I know what it's like to feel you don't belong....Music is powerful. Music saves lives."

BRETT BUTLER replying to a male co-worker who says women can't bluff playing poker on *Grace Under Fire*: "Listen, if you can fake an orgasm, you can raise on a pair of twos."...."Meryl [Stree] gave me this gift that made me sob in my [*Sunset Boulevard*] dressing room," said **GLENN CLOSE** in *Entertainment Weekly*. "She had this beautiful pair of pearl earrings that I first noticed when we read the *House of Spirits* script. A week later, a package arrived at the stage door, and in it were these beautiful antique pearls with a note saying, 'They're battered but beautiful, just like the best of us.' It was the greatest thing anyone has ever given me."

GROUPS

UBAKA HILL'S DRUMSONG INSTITUTE has many special projects for 1994, including workshops, recordings, and *A Drumsong For World Peace* (featuring a fifty-member national women's drum and percussion ensemble). SASE to Drumsong Institute, 311 Quincy St., Brooklyn, NY 11216. (718) 857-3758....**BRANCHING OUT PRODUCTIONS** presents a full season each year of women's culture entertainment. Last season's lineup included Cris and Tret, Deidre McCalla, JoAnn Loulan, and Dos Fallopia. P.O. Box 2906, Indianapolis, IN 46206. (317) 637-2906....Interested in women's parties in Chicago? Pat McCombs has been planning successful social events geared primarily to the interests of African American lesbians since 1982. **EXECUTIVE SWEET**, 1607 W. Barry, Chicago, IL 60657.

AUNT LUTE BOOKS in conjunction with an NEA Advancement Grant is hoping to start a special program called *Founding Friends*. In order to raise \$53,000 in the next two years, Aunt Lute is looking for fifty

people to donate \$500-\$1000 each for two years. All donor names will be listed in the books Aunt Lute publishes. Call Fabienne McPhail at (415) 558-8116....**WOMEN IN THE WILDERNESS** organizes outdoor trips every year to various locales (Amazon Rainforest, Virgin Islands, the Canadian Northwest Territories). 566 Ottawa Ave., St. Paul, MN 55107. (612) 227-2284.

GLAAD/NY PROJECTS: with Video Cabaret, they produced *LESBIAN CENTRAL*, a Pride Week cable TV special on lesbian culture, humor, issues, and identity; their **LESBIAN SHORTSTOPS PROJECT** erected a thirty-foot-mural of lesbian softball players at the Yankee Stadium subway stop; they inspired the BBC to produce a major **DOCUMENTARY ON HOMOPHOBIA IN MUSIC**; and they helped plan the first-ever **PANEL ON GAY AND LESBIAN ISSUES** presented at the National Association of Black Journalists. GLAAD, 150 W. 26th St., New York, NY 10001.

The **AMERICAN PHYSICAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION** now has a lesbian/gay caucus, reports *Lavender Prairie News*. At the 1993 annual APTA conference, the membership at large added sexual orientation to its policy on provision of services and patient rights as well as to its non-discrimination policy. The lesbian/gay group publishes a newsletter called *Alternative Modalities*. Contact Julia Chevan, P.O. Box 60313, Florence, MA 01060-0313.

Sherri Poe, founder/president/CEO of the female-owned and -operated sports shoe company Ryka, has formed the **ROSE (Regaining One's Self-Esteem) FOUNDATION** to help women coping with violence in their lives. Seven percent of the profit from each shoe sale goes into the ROSE fund. 1 (800) 255-RYKA.

LESBIAN MOTHER'S NATIONAL DEFENSE FUND has a new program, *Adopt-A-Mother*, which provides emotional and financial support for lesbian mothers going through custody battles. (206) 325-2643....To find a shelter, crisis center, or community outreach center in your area, contact the **NATIONAL WOMEN VICTIM CENTER INFOLINK**. 1 (800) FYI-CALL.

LESBIAN AND GAY HOSPITALITY EXCHANGE INTERNATIONAL saves members money on accommodations as well as helps them develop lasting friendships with hosts and other visitors. Garnet Colly, P.O.

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CRIS WILLIAMSON & TRET FURE



THE WASHINGTON SISTERS



DIANNE DAVIDSON

The fifth annual
**PACIFIC NORTHWEST WOMEN'S
MUSIC & CULTURAL JAMBOREE**

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Activities include four concerts, two dances, a workshop series,
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REGISTRATION INFORMATION

WHAT IS A JAMBOREE PASS? A Jamboree pass includes all concerts and programming Friday through Sunday. Jamboree passes do *not* include room and board. No tickets will be sold to single events—you must purchase a Jamboree Pass to attend *any* Jamboree event!

ROOM & BOARD - Resident hall housing is available on Friday and Saturday nights. Rates include linen, pillow, towel, wash-cloth and soap. Roommate selections will be made on site. You must purchase a Jamboree Pass in addition to registering for room and board—room and board prices *do not* include entrance to any concerts/activities!

REGISTRATION FORM (Please print clearly)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

SERVICES - Please send information about:

- Child Care
- Differently-abled
- Program Ad
- Hotel Info
- Camping Info
- Selling Crafts
- Work Exchange (limited availability)
- Presenting a Workshop

JAMBOREE PASS (includes entrance to all events July 1, 2 & 3) \$ 90 Advance/\$ 95 Gate
(Children 6 & under - free; 7 to 11 - half price; 12 & over - full price)

ROOM & BOARD (includes 2 nights in dorm and dinner on Friday; breakfast, lunch & dinner on Saturday and breakfast on Sunday.) You must purchase a Jamboree Pass to obtain entrance to concerts & activities.
Double (per person) . . . \$105 Advance/\$115 Gate
Roommate request _____
Single \$120 Advance/\$130 Gate

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

PLEASE CHARGE MY M/C Visa (\$6 service charge per Jamboree Pass or Housing Ticket)
_____ Exp. _____ Name (as it appears on card) _____

Please make checks payable to PNWMCJ, Inc., 25-6 N.W. 23rd Place #416, Portland, OR 97210-3534.
Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. & Jamboree capacity is limited! & First come, first serve basis.
For further information, call (503) 281-3874 or fax (503) 281-3881 & No refunds or exchanges. & No pets allowed.

NOTEWORTHY WOMEN

MISS BESSIE SMITH: EMPRESS OF THE BLUES

By Rosetta Reitz

Bessie Smith is one of the most important women in the history of American music because she was the first to change a folk expression into an indigenous art form by successfully blending African and Western modes of music. The musical combination she birthed is the significant base of America's chief contribution to world culture: blues/jazz.

Miss Bessie (as she preferred to be called) was a master performer with a commanding stage presence and a rich contralto that could project the deepest feelings. People fortunate to have seen her perform have described her as Junoesque, mesmerizing, and majestic. She became known as The Empress of the Blues.

She was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on April 15, 1894, one of six children in a poor family. She was not related to Mamie, Clara, or Trixie Smith, and her given name was Bessie (not Elizabeth). Her father William, a part-time preacher, died shortly after her birth. Her mother Laura, who did laundry to support the family, died when Bessie was nine years old. Her oldest sister Viola also did laundry while trying to raise her sisters and brothers and her own baby.

Heroic figures are always surrounded by myths and legends. It's sometimes difficult to separate fact from the fiction. Because the myths about Bessie Smith are repeated so often, they often are taken as gospel truth.

Part of the legend about young Bessie is that she cared very little for school except for performing in school plays, but we know that she learned to read and write. She had to be extremely bright to eventually organize and produce shows, write more than twenty-five songs, and forge a synthesis of various music.

As a child, she performed on the streets of Chattanooga by singing and dancing for pennies to the guitar accompaniment of her brother Andrew. Her



Miss Bessie Smith, pictured in 1925, brought dignity and majesty to the blues. (Photo courtesy of Rosetta Reitz.)

brother Clarence had joined Moses Stokes Show, and when they played in Chattanooga he arranged an audition for his younger sister. The most believable story suggests that Bessie joined the troupe as a dancer in the chorus, later becoming a singer and comedienne. Her age at this time varies in the accounts, but since she was tall and buxom, she could have been only fourteen passing for sixteen.

Gertrude (Pridgett) Rainey and her husband Will were among the dozen members of the troupe, and were in fact the stars of the show, billed as "Ma and Pa Rainey." A stage-struck child would certainly be impressed by a successful performer who sported gold teeth and a necklace of \$20 gold pieces, who wore diamond-studded tiaras and rings, who flounced in silks and satins and feathers and furbelows.

Another version of Bessie's start in the traveling shows is that she began with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, a company Ma Rainey worked with many times. Yet another is that she and Ma Rainey met in Tolliver's Circus and Musical Extravagan-

za. In any case, they met early in Bessie's career and worked together on at least two occasions as Bessie was starting out.

The two women remained good friends during their lives, despite their ten-year age difference. Bessie used some of Ma Rainey's songs in her repertoire and even recorded some, such as "Boweavil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues." They wrote a couple of songs together later in their lives, including "Don't Fish In My Sea" and "Weepin' Woman Blues," which Ma Rainey recorded in 1928.

Ma Rainey's influence on Bessie's musical style is clearly identifiable in Bessie's earliest recordings of 1923 and 1924. But Bessie's charisma is clearly her own, and as she became more successful and worldly—especially after feeling at home in New York City—her singing reflected changes by becoming more urban and sophisticated.

Bessie Smith invented herself: she developed the technique to execute her fertile imagination of how the music should sound, and carried that responsibility like the quintessential singer she was. She didn't try to sound like anyone else; she knew what she wanted.

Not long after Bessie joined the road shows, when she was in her mid-teens, she wound up in a working residence at the 81 Theater in Atlanta, one of the theaters on the Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) circuit, which was a network of theaters that presented black performers. Acts would get work for six months, booked into a specific set of theaters. Bessie worked in various theaters on the circuit and barnstormed the rural areas performing in cabarets, dance halls, and levee camps. But she always came back to the 81, using it as a base. For a while Bessie traveled with F.S. Wolcott's Rabbit Foot Minstrels, as well as Pete Werley's and Silas Green's respective shows. She then worked with The Florida Cotton Pickers, where she teamed up with Clarence Williams (who would become the piano player on many of her later records).

By about 1920 she was producing her own shows for the 81 and taking them on

NOTEWORTHY WOMEN is devoted to reclaiming and celebrating the talent and accomplishments of our lost and denied musical foremothers.

the road. One, called *Liberty Belles*, has been much written about because her chorus line was so hot and hard-driving. But they weren't the usual "sepia lovelies." Instead, they were plump and dark. Some theater owners gave Bessie a hard time about them, but she was obstinate: "If they don't work, I won't either." When she used the same kind of chorus line fourteen years later at the Apollo, the owner politely asked her to permit him to supply another line. Again, she was immovable and got her way.

Bessie left the South in 1921 to work alone with a band in Philadelphia at the Standard Theater. In 1922 she returned to Atlantic City in a show at the Paradise Gardens. She bought a house in Philadelphia and brought her family up from Chattanooga. She also fulfilled one of her hidden wishes, to do gardening, when she bought a farmhouse for herself later in New Jersey.

Back in Philadelphia, she joined a show called *How Come* with Sidney Bechet at the Dunbar Theater. It was a spectacular success, particularly their duet on "St. Louis Blues" (her voice with his clarinet offstage). The duo toured with the show—Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago—but when they were about to hit New York the promoters felt it should be "fancier up" and hired Alberta Hunter to replace Bessie. (This was before Bessie made records; Alberta already had recorded a dozen for Black Swan and Paramount.)

BESSIE'S STAR RISES

Bessie wanted to record. Since Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" had become a revolutionary hit—she was the first black person to sing the blues on a record—Bessie knew she could be successful at it, too. But it took many tries before she finally signed a contract with Columbia. In 1921, she tested with Emerson Records, Columbia, OKeh, and Black Swan, but was rejected by all of them for sounding "too rough." (Black Swan, which advertised itself as the only "genuine colored" record label, did take Alberta Hunter and Ethel Waters.) Even Thomas Edison turned down Bessie's voice.

Finally, in April 1923, she signed with Frank Walker, who took over the "race records" for Columbia. Her first record, "Downhearted Blues" backed by "Gulf Coast Blues," sold an amazing 780,000 records in its first six months. That summer she married Jack Gee, a night watchman, whom she allowed to be her manager and with whom she lived (and fought

with) off and on for six years.

Her star truly began to shine with the records, and she played the best theaters at the best salaries. The first stop on her Southern tour, where she opened after recording nine songs, was her old home base, the 81 Theater on Decatur Street in Atlanta. And what a welcome back reception she got! Every performance was sold out. The white radio station even broadcast her show live, which was unheard of at that time.

It was common for lines to form two blocks long with people waiting to attend a Bessie Smith show. She was the biggest name and the biggest draw in the world of race records and the T.O.B.A. Full-page advertisements appeared in the black press announcing her new record releases.

She became an urban blues singer, not limiting herself to the twelve-bar format. She recorded a variety of songs, including Tin Pan Alley music, to which she always brought her blues inflections and expressions. For example, one of the great American standards, "After You've Gone," was written as a popular tune in 1918. The way Bessie sang it is an exquisite example of her genius, of the way she interpreted the music. She sang the word "gone" in ten different ways. Her sense of rhythm was superb—she could place her phrases on, off, before, or after the beat, even on top or below it. And she could bend a note or stop in the middle of it to create the tension she wanted. This subtle timing and phrasing was carefully planned in spite of her innate musicianship and flawless technique. She practiced a lot, with and without her musicians, and what sounds like improvisation is the result of hard work and an understanding of the infinite possibilities of invention.

Bessie used her voice as an instrument. Her moans and groans, slurs and swoops, scoops and slides (sometimes down a whole octave) were as carefully employed as each stroke on a master's canvas. Her perfect pitch and control gave a freshness to everything she sang. These are the qualities that made her the first jazz singer. Some writers have claimed that title for Louis Armstrong, who served as trumpeter on nine of her records, but Bessie had been working professionally longer than he had, and she was about five years older.

When they recorded together for the first time in January 1925, Bessie was already a big success from her records and from vaudeville tours. She was being billed as "The Greatest and Highest Salaried Race Star in the World." Louis was a

sideman on her record date, and his job then was in the third trumpet chair in the Fletcher Henderson band playing at the Roseland Ballroom.

Bessie used great jazz musicians as accompanists. But they were always listed under her name when she cut a record. (And it was literally "cutting" a record—in the early acoustic recordings, singers would sing into a big horn, which activated a stylus that cut into a block of wax.)

When one listens to Bessie's records, the dialogue between her and the instrumentalists is most apparent. Not only did the musicians complement her, but they engaged in the call and response pattern (used in church) with her, as a way of underlining her statements or responding to them. The classic blues queens of the 1920s formulated this style. They set the pace with their phrasing and cadence. And Miss Bessie was the archetypical queen. This characteristic is distinctively American and has become one of the most engaging attributes of jazz.

Billie Holiday acknowledged learning her technique from listening to Bessie. She, too, kept the blues in her heart and used those intonations and phrasings when she sang pop. Mahalia Jackson also claimed Bessie as her mentor, as did Mildred Bailey, Connee Boswell, Dinah Washington, Big Mama Thornton, and many others.

It is important to remember that a singer is not the person who is the subject of the song. Many people made that mistake, particularly with Bessie Smith's songs, by assuming they were autobiographical. One of the typical mistakes made was identifying her with "Me and My Gin." I have heard from people who knew her contemporaries that she actually preferred scotch.

"Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," which she recorded in May of 1929 in New York City, is another of the songs people mistakenly presume is autobiographical. Not since she started working as a teenager was Bessie Smith ever down and out. In fact, by 1929 she

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ABOUT THE WRITER: Jazz historian/writer Rosetta Reitz started her own record label in 1979 as part of her musical crusade to bring more recognition to the often-forgotten women who have enriched our jazz/blues heritage. For a catalog, send SASE to Rosetta Records, 115 W. 16th #267, New York, NY 10011. This article is © 1991 by Rosetta Reitz and may appear in her forthcoming book on musical foremothers.

FADE IN • FADE OUT

REVENGE VIDEOS

By Ann Collette

Whether she goes about it cold as a snake or hot as the sun, a woman bent on revenge incarnates passion gone awry. Determined to find the justice she feels has been denied her, she attempts to control what nobody can: life. But sometimes getting even, especially as the sexually violated woman discovers, can be only another illusion in a world full of them.

As the five women featured in the following videos find out, not only can it sometimes fail to compensate for what was originally lost, but the cruel irony at the heart of revenge is that in achieving it a woman may end up sacrificing the very thing she was trying to protect in the first place.

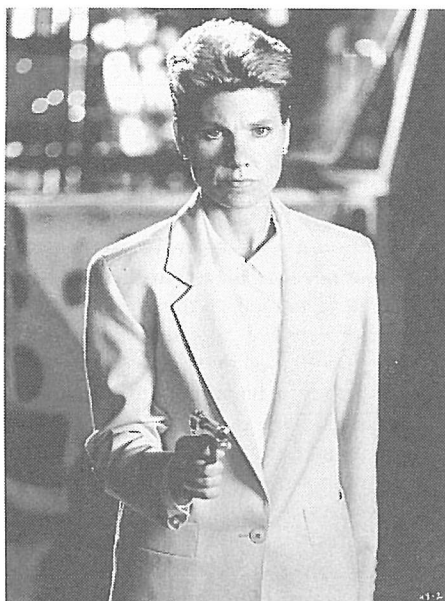
POSITIVE I.D.

Realtor/housewife/mother Julie Kenner (Stephanie Rascoe) has lost her identity. It's been one year since she was savagely tortured and raped, and though she's under a psychiatrist's care, she's unable to reassume the roles she once filled so ably, so happily. Her husband Don has been compassionate and patient, but dealing with Julie's traumatized condition has been difficult for him, too. And her children, too young to understand, don't really know their mother anymore.

Don encourages Julie to try and enjoy herself, and takes her to a neighborhood party that's being thrown just for them. But Julie believes her neighbors just want to gawk at her and, telling Don she's "not ready," insists he take her home. An insensitive and prurient neighbor named Dana pushes Julie deeper into her trauma, and she becomes nearly a zombie.

Then a report about changing one's identity comes on TV, and, for the first time in months, Julie's interest in something outside her own agony comes alive. Unfortunately, it's only for a brief while, and

FADE IN•FADE OUT: In these tight economic times, more women than ever are turning to videos to stretch their entertainment dollars. **FADE IN • FADE OUT** is a handy guide, from a woman-identified perspective, to rentable titles.



Dr. Margaret Ford (Lindsay Crouse) becomes enmeshed in mind games in *House of Games*.

after that initial burst of attention, her condition continues to deteriorate. She's close to suicide when a phone call from her daughter's school (looking for a birth certificate for the child) rekindles her fascination with changing her identity.

Once Julie discovers how easy it is to obtain public documents such as birth and death certificates, she feels she's discovered a path out of her misery. While Dana sets about seducing Don and stealing the children's hearts, Julie begins an elaborate subterfuge designed to trick Don and her former boss at the real estate office into believing she's on the road to recovery. Not even the news that her rapist is to be released from prison early (due to his collaboration in a mob arrest) seems to shake her positive progress.

But it isn't recovery she's obsessed with—it's rebirth. As "Bobbi," a sexy, sweet, working girl down on her luck, Julie sets up a complete new residence and new image. She begins hanging around an unsavory bar with a persistence and determination that fascinates the viewer; what in the world is she up to? Bobbi's looking for revenge, but what does this mean for

Julie? Just who is it who regains her sexuality by the film's end? Through a brilliantly staged act of revenge, in a plot full of twists and turns, Bobbi tries to regain for Julie the life that once was hers. (MCA Home Video, 1987.)

THE REINCARNATION OF GOLDEN LOTUS

No one's lost more than Golden Lotus (the exquisite Joi Wong): She's carrying her severed head when we first meet her. On her bound feet, she stands before a Lady Of Myth, the Lady Meng, perhaps, who urges Lotus to drink "the tea of forgetfulness" and pass on to the next step of reincarnation.

But Lotus vehemently insists on revenge against her murderer.

By the time the credit sequence ends, the time frame has changed from ancient China to Shanghai, 1968, during the height of the Cultural Revolution. Schoolgirls in pristine, military-influenced uniforms are rehearsing a revolutionary ballet. As one particularly sweet-faced orphan laces up her slippers, she finds herself singing a little song she didn't even know she knew. A vision of tiny feet from another time, bound ones she doesn't recognize, flashes through her mind, and she has no idea what to make of it. It's hard to understand anything in the world she lives in, one where individuals are singled out for bloody, public humiliation, while book-burning bonfires light up the streets where she walks.

The child grows into a lovely young woman—one the principal of the ballet school begins to eye with lust. Before she understands what's happening, he forces himself upon her, all the while trying to bribe her into willing participation. Other women break into the room where the violent act is occurring, but instead of aiding Golden Lotus, they choose to believe in the man's innocence. Beating Lotus, they accuse her of being a slut. As punishment, she's thrown out of the academy and sent to do factory work, where her "reputation" has preceded her.

© 1987 Orion Pictures

She's blamed for the interest men show in her, accused of "flirting again," and is ostracized by the other workers.

One male co-worker, Wu-long, is kind to her, and Golden Lotus is attracted to him, too. (There's one moment in their encounter you'll love: After Golden Lotus winces in pain, Wu-long asks her what's wrong. "Just menstruation," she replies, an answer he accepts without embarrassment or shame. Imagine such openness in a Western film!)

Wu-long is an excellent basketball player. Lotus gives him a pair of new sneakers she saved her money to buy, which causes her fellow workers to find the "bourgeois slut" guilty of "sex and hedonism." They urge Wu-long to purge her through a beating; he acquiesces to the peer pressure. Afterwards, Lotus is taken away in a truck to another province, and Wu-long never finds the courage to tell her how he really feels.

As a peasant, Golden Lotus attracts the attention of a rich Hong Kong baker, Wu-dai. He offers to marry the beautiful woman, who accepts (in order to escape the bleak harshness of her life). Hong Kong and capitalism are whole new ballgames to her, and she enjoys the wealth and freedom enough so that it doesn't matter if she doesn't love her husband. The visions that have troubled her since childhood have remained a constant, though, and when Wu-long reenters her life, they intensify all the more. Golden Lotus's past and present lives are about to culminate in an explosive revenge, one where she'll get exactly what she thinks she wanted.

Clara Law has directed a complex story featuring a very strong role for a woman, one perfectly played out by the fabulous Joi Wong. There's only one thing that bugs me about this movie: Shouldn't Lotus have asked for revenge against her rapist, versus her murderer? Some choice, huh? (Connoisseur Video Collection, 1989, subtitled. *P.S. Ignore the soft-porn style picture on the front of the amaray; it's very unrepresentative of the film.*)

HOUSE OF GAMES

Don't let anyone tell you the specific plot twists (or ending) of this one before you see it. Everything is misleading in this terse, staccato film starring Lindsay

ABOUT THE WRITER: Ann Collette is a book and film reviewer residing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she is currently working on a novel of her own.

Crouse as Dr. Margaret Ford, a chain-smoking psychiatrist who has written a best-selling self-help book called *Driven*. A handsome woman given to severe tailoring and a no-fuss hairstyle, Margaret knows whereof she writes. Whether taking notes during a session with a patient locked in an institution for the criminally insane or signing autographs for eager fans who approach her in public, it's all the same to her. Like the workaholic she is, she methodically proceeds from task to task, without ever stopping to indulge in the pleasures her newfound fame and fortune have brought her.

When a near-suicidal patient (desperate due to a \$25,000 gambling debt he can't pay) threatens to kill himself in her office, Margaret swears she'll help him if he will only hand the gun over to her. Her promise leads her to the tawdry, run-down House of Games, a gambling den where she meets Mike (Joe Mantegna), a con man extraordinaire. He shows her the I.O.U. he holds on her patient; he offers to cancel the debt if she'll agree to pretend to be his girlfriend during an upcoming poker game. He wants her to watch for the "tell" (an inadvertent giveaway exhibited by a player that reveals whether or not he's bluffing). She's attracted to Mike, who, like her, believes himself to be smarter than everyone else. Intrigued, sure she has the number of everyone around

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Editor's Choice

WHEN REVENGE IS SWEET

It was panned by the critics, but *She-Devil* is one of my all-time favorite movies. Let me tell you why.

Based on Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, this feminist comedy's central theme is Don't Fuck With Me—the credo by which its star lives in real life.

Ruth Patchett (Roseanne Arnold), a housewife whose life revolves around pleasing her family, suspects that her accountant husband is having an affair with a successful writer of romance novels. Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep) "is pretty and rich and thin; she writes books about love and lives in a palace by the sea," says Ruth in a narrative voiceover. "Fortunately, I can trust my husband."

When sweet Ruth discovers her trust to be, um, misplaced, she sets out to take control of her life. Along the way, she helps a lot of women as she elevates herself and gets her revenge.

The film is overtly, consciously feminist, and I can't help but think that's part of why the male critics didn't enjoy it. *She-Devil* doesn't ask the viewer to understand or relate to badly behaved men or the women who love them—instead, our sentiments are solidly with the woman who's been wronged.

Also, unlike most films, it portrays friendship between women as desirable and productive. Cooperation rather than competition is stressed. Ruth hooks up with Nurse Hooper (Linda Hunt, pictured above with Roseanne), and they hitch their stars to the same rising dream. In the process, they help other

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OPENING NIGHT

A FAREWELL TO JOAN OF ARC

By Carolyn Gage

It was Minneapolis, 1991. I was on tour in my one-woman show, *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc*. It was the middle of the performance, and suddenly all the lights blew. There was some confusion, and I stopped the show until the problem was solved. I turned my back to the audience for a few seconds to collect myself before I went on. And then it happened....

I couldn't turn around. I wouldn't turn around. There I stood, with a waiting audience, and I could not make myself turn around and go on with the performance. It felt like I stood there for an eternity. Finally, some combination of bullying and persuasion, some shred of professionalism kicked in, and I was able to finish the show.

But that was my warning sign. I knew then that the day was coming when I was going to walk off the stage, and I would not come back. Or maybe I would not go on at all.

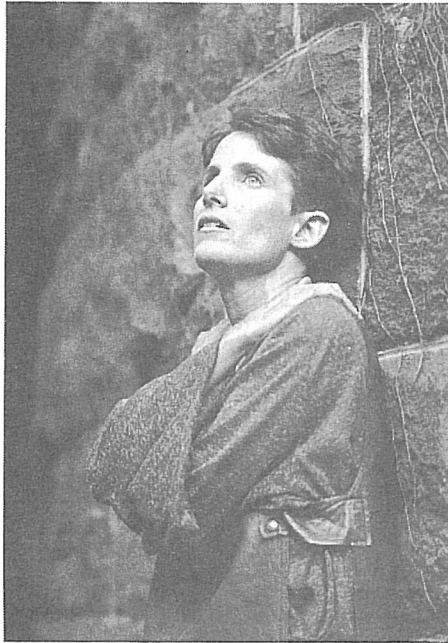
Why the burn-out?

Doing Joan had taken such a massive toll on my emotional well-being, it was coming down to a survival issue. It was either me or Joan, but we were not going to be able to go on together sharing the same body. Not for love or money. What was happening was that I was becoming Joan, and we all know what happened to her. In Minneapolis, I caught my first whiff of smoke.

I wrote *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc* during a lawsuit against the University of Oregon. I had been compelled to participate in a dummy credit scandal when I was a graduate student there, and I had blown the whistle on the department running the scam. After a year of dragging their heels, the university issued their final report: I was "emotionally unstable."

Be that as it may, I was now thoroughly pissed. I recruited support from my senator, the state legislature, and the

OPENING NIGHT: Theater by, for, and about women. Introducing theater groups, feminist plays, and playwrights who are writing the classic woman-identified plays of tomorrow.



Linda J. Russell

Carolyn Gage uses Joan of Arc's story as a warning for contemporary women. As Joan says, "The men haven't changed, the rules haven't changed, and the institutions haven't changed. The fact that there are more of you women doing it [working in the man's world] just means that they're getting ready to build a bigger fire."

Portland papers. I found a lawyer willing to take the case on contingency, and I filed a million-dollar suit. So then the Attorney General's office was in on the witch hunt.

The suit was eventually thrown out of court, but not before I came out as a lesbian, became estranged from my family, lost my job in the public schools, quit my church, and wrote *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc*.

During this period of upheaval, I had run across a biography of Joan by Vita Sackville-West, a lesbian writer who is probably best known for sleeping with Virginia Woolf. Her biography, based on the actual trial transcripts—Joan's own words—was obviously tracking the lesbian connections. Vita was interested in Joan's cross-dressing, in her relations with her family (incest, alcoholism), in her

friendships with women (yes, she slept with women), and in her highly personal sense of connection to the spirit world.

Joan of Arc (real name, Jeanne Romee) is a thrilling Lesbian archetype, because she descended to the very heart of patriarchy. She crowned the king, she led the army, she took on the pope. No other woman in history has ever been so privy to the inner workings of the church, state, and military. Believing herself to be a super-patriot, a national hero, and a Catholic of such devotion the saints had chosen her as mascot, Joan was shocked to discover that the very institutions for which she was risking her life considered her an enemy and were out to destroy her.

I use Joan's story as a warning for contemporary women. As Joan says, "The men haven't changed, the rules haven't changed, and the institutions haven't changed. The fact that there are more of you women doing it [working in the man's world] just means that they're getting ready to build a bigger fire."

Jeanne Romee ran away from home at seventeen. By nineteen, she was dead.

I wrote her as a swaggering, tough-talking teenage butch lesbian. Underneath all the bravado is a scared and lonely girl who has sabotaged her relationships with other girls out of fear of rejection. This Jeanne is an incest survivor, an anorexic, a girl who has attempted suicide—an incredibly fierce warrior who had no idea what kind of evil she was up against.

All of the assumptions in my play are based on evidence from the trial. Some of the dialogue is direct translation. (During her trial, for example, one of her prurient examiners asked if St. Michael was wearing any clothes when he appeared to her. Jeanne answered, "What do you think? God's too poor to give him any?")

The image of Jeanne as a simple and pious peasant girl who responded automatically to mysterious commands from another world is a revisionist myth designed to explain away her profound deviance, her utter rejection of roles for women, her tremendous ambition, and her superhuman resistance to the unspeakable

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torment of her imprisonment. When the Catholic Church realized that her burning had enhanced her reputation, not undermined it, they scrambled to switch her status from "heretic" to "saint"—a move which would allow them to steal the credit for her heroism.

JOAN AND ME

I toured with *Joan* for five years, from 1987 to 1992. It was an excruciating role to perform—not to mention the mountain of text I had to memorize with every gig. Night after night, I had to conjure the white heat of teenage fury, the shock and pain of betrayal. I used my own experiences to access the emotions. A survivor myself, I never went through a period of adolescent resistance. I was too busy hid-

ing. So now, at mid-life, I was going through emotional puberty for the first time. And I was doing it publicly and nationally.

I came down with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFIDS). But having become merged with the persona of Joan, I called it "laziness" and pressed on. During this time, I founded No To Men Theatre, a radical women's company in Ashland, Oregon. In two years, we produced nineteen plays and a coffeehouse. I had written thirteen of the plays myself. I acted, directed, performed, produced, and still went out on tour.

And then I collapsed.

In 1992 I left Oregon. The climate had become too hostile for me to work, and my health situation was desperate. I now understand the suicidality of that period

to have been a side effect of CFIDS, but at the time, I assumed I was having a nervous breakdown.

I moved to Northern California, performed *Joan* twice more, and called it quits. In June, I recorded my farewell performance at the Institute for the Musical Arts in Bodega, with the tremendously supportive June Millington and Ann Hackler.

The first recording session was a complete washout. (Without an audience, I was unwilling or unable to commit to the raw edge of the piece.) At the second taping, June and Ann had arranged for an audience, and we went live with the recording.

Many people have wondered why I chose to make an audiocassette instead of video. The answer is simple: It doesn't work on film. As Marshall McLuhan says, there are hot and cool media. Radio is hot, TV is cool. *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc* is almost too hot to touch. On film, I have to scale back the urgency and the rage, because it just comes across as silly. On audiocassette, however, I can be as "hot" as I am in performance, because the listener is alone with the voice and her own experience. There's no third party interpreting—which is what the camera does.

Anyway, I have retired from touring, and am hoping to make the work more accessible by distributing the tape nationally. There are two actors at this time with plans to tour, and there are also plans for a French translation for Canadian production. Irene Reti of HerBooks will be publishing the text in *The No To Men Theatre Collection*, which is an anthology of the work I did in Ashland—along with the dramatic history of the theater.

In the end, what would I say about the experience of playing Joan? It was the most dangerous thing I've ever done. But wherever I went with the piece, women would come up to me and tell me that their lives would never again be the same. The letters I received were wonderful. To all of the women who supported the work—thank you.

Jeanne lives.

The audiocassette of 'The Second Coming of Joan of Arc' may be ordered from Carolyn Gage, P.O. Box 12304, Santa Rosa, CA 95406. •

ABOUT THE WRITER: Carolyn Gage has recently finished a manual on lesbian theater. She is currently residing in Northern California, where she continues to write lesbian plays and screenplays, and to encourage lesbians to *Take Stage!*

HOTLINE from page 10

Box 612, Station C, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2L 4K5....The November 1993 *Even In Mississippi* newsletter announced the opening of a new **GAY AND LESBIAN CENTER**. G. L. Friendly Community Center, 308 Caillavet St., Biloxi, MS. (601) 435-2398.

A portion of the profits from the new Cris Williamson/Tret Fure album *Postcards From Paradise* will benefit **IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILDREN, INC.**, a nonprofit volunteer group that works with hospital and community pediatric AIDS programs to raise awareness and funds.

GATHERINGS

The women who bring us the **NEWMR FESTIVAL** are taking this year to find and purchase land. There will be no festival this year, but they haven't gone out of business. SASE to NEWMR, P.O. Box 550, Branford, CT 06405....The second annual **NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMEDY CONFERENCE** is scheduled for October 7-9 in Columbus, Ohio. To get on mailing list: NWCC, 26151 Lake Shore Blvd. #2112, Cleveland, OH 44132-1160. (216) 289-2939, fax (216) 289-5885....**SUMMERSING '94** Music Empowerment Camp for Women will take place June 26-July 2 in British Columbia and July 31-August 6 in Montana. Simultaneous non-programmed retreat time also available. Enrollment is limited. SASE to Judy Fjell Music Empowerment, P.O. Box 2001, Yountville, CA 94599. (707) 944-2420.

The **1994 WOMEN'S MOTORCYCLE FESTIVAL** will be held July 18-22 in Rochester. Group rides, workshops, slow speed riding competitions. Entertainment will include comic Diane Amos, singer Leah Zicari, the Bad Dog No Biscuit Band, and the Twisted Sister All Star Revue (talent show). WMF, 7 Lent Ave., LeRoy, NY 14482. (716) 768-6054....The **1998 GAY GAMES** will be held in Amsterdam.

The Stadtlanders Foundation has launched the **RAISE THE RAINBOW PROJECT** to raise money for AIDS charities nationwide. A mile-long rainbow flag will be carried in the **INTERNATIONAL MARCH ON THE UNITED NATIONS** on June 26, 1994. The first 10,000 people to donate appropriate funds will carry the flag. The Stadtlanders Foundation, 600 Penn Center Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15235-5810. 1(800) NYC-1994....The NYC Committee of **STONEWALL 25** has relocated to the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, 208 W. 13th St., New York, NY 10011. (212) 620-7310.

18 HOT WIRE May 1994

The sixth annual **LAMBDA LITERARY AWARDS** will be held on May 27 to coincide with the **AMERICAN BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION** in Los Angeles. To receive a ballot, contact Lambda Book Report, 1625 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009-1013. (202) 462-7924....The fifth **INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST BOOK FAIR** is scheduled for July 27-31 in Melbourne, Australia. IFBF, GPO Box 2681, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. (03) 663-3355.

The seventh annual **LESBIAN SEPARATIST GATHERING** is scheduled for October 7-10 in Santa Cruz. Annual Gathering, P.O. Box 21475, Oakland, CA 94620....The **INTERNATIONAL DYKE MARCH AND BALL** will be held June 25. Contact the Lesbian Avengers for more info. (212) 967-7711 x3204....The **NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE AND FESTIVAL** is scheduled for July 9-17 in Australia. NLCF, P.O. Box 211, Red Hill, Queensland 4059, Australia....The **NATIONAL LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL** is tentatively scheduled for the first and second weekends of August in Atlanta. The festival will focus on the performing arts (poetry readings, gospel music concerts, full-length plays). Call festival coordinator S. Faybell Ma-Hee at (404) 388-4624.

The December issue of 'Deneuve' magazine reports that k.d. lang will be playing a born-again Christian in a new film called 'Teresa's Tattoo.' If that doesn't catch your interest, get this: it will be directed by Julie Cypher, Melissa Etheridge's lover.

The **INTERNATIONAL GODDESS FESTIVAL** in northern California is scheduled for May 19-22. Women's Spirituality Forum, P.O. Box 11363, Oakland, CA 94611. (510) 444-7724....The eighth annual **GOLDEN THREADS CELEBRATION** is scheduled for June 24-26 in Provincetown. Christine Burton, P.O. Box 60475, Northampton, MA 01060-0475.

The eighteenth annual **SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY FILM FESTIVAL** will be held June 9-19.

More than 51,000 people attended last year's festival. Frameline, 346 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94104. (415) 703-8650....

The third **ASIAN LESBIAN NETWORK CONFERENCE** is scheduled for August 12-15 in Taipei, Taiwan. One hundred spaces are available to non-Asians. ALN Taiwan, P.O. Box 7-760, Taipei 160, Taiwan....The fourth **WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**, "Action for Equality, Development, and Peace" is scheduled for September 4-15, 1995, in Beijing, China. Donna Allen, Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Pl. NW, Washington, DC 20008-3332. (202) 966-7783.

The **NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**, "Teaching, Theory, and Action: Women Working In A Global Perspective," is scheduled for June 15-19. NWSA '94, Kris Anderson, 105 Landscape Architecture, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011...."Women's Voices/Women's Power: Theory, Action, Transformation," the fourth annual **WOMEN'S STUDIES CONFERENCE**, is scheduled for October 1-2. Deadline for submissions of proposals: June 10 (latest). Contact Dr. Vara Neve-row, English Dept., Southern Connecticut State University, 501 Crescent St., New Haven, CT 06515. (203) 397-4204.

TV • RADIO

At press time, the Arnolds were battling with ABC-TV over whether or not an **EPI-SODE OF ROSEANNE FEATURING A LESBIAN KISSING SCENE** would be aired. In the scene, Roseanne Conner has been dancing in a gay bar with Nancy (Sandra Bernhard)'s girlfriend (played by Mariel Hemingway). "We ought to hang out more often," says Mariel's character. "Yeah, I was thinking that, too, but next time let's leave the wives at home," jokes Roseanne—at which point she gets smooched. According to *TV Guide*, ABC rejected the script; the Arnolds filmed it anyway, and were refused permission to air it on its scheduled March 1 date. An ABC executive told Tom Arnold, "A lot of kids watch this show and might be led to believe that homosexual kissing is okay." (Tom's reply: "What's wrong with it?")

Ellen DeGeneres's show **THESE FRIENDS OF MINE** is being hailed as "*The Mary Tyler Moore Show* for the '90s." Ellen's pal **MELISSA ETHERIDGE** penned the show's theme song....Did you catch **FANNIE FLAGG** last December 17 on *Vicki!* showing how to make **FRIED GREEN TOMATOES**?

continued on inside back cover

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COMEDY CONFERENCE DIARY

By Judith Sloan

DAY ONE

Friday evening, November 12. I'm flying to Cleveland. I'm schlepping my tape recorder, newspapers, and the little props for characters I might need while emceeing the Saturday night performance.

I decide to go the day before the Saturday night performance to see what's happening. Karen Williams, the organizer of this event, told me she was trying to pull together straight women, bisexuals, and lesbians for a national women's comedy festival. Ambitious.

I'm on my way to the site for the conference and performances, the Embassy Suites. Apparently it's a hotel chain, but I'd never heard of it. Just like I never heard of Long John Silver's until I was touring in Illinois and Indiana. (I thought Long John Silver had something to do with Clarence Thomas.)

The trip from the airport takes us on highways and long stretches of roads with many malls. I'm beginning to feel nervous. Situated in a neighborhood of hotels, we arrive at the Embassy Suites. I walk inside and begin to panic. It is a pink and green completely controlled atmosphere—an indoor setting landscaped and designed to look like a small town with street lamps, cast iron benches, walkways, and ponds with running water. There are even live turtles in the water. The lights are dimmed at twilight, simulating sunset before the street lights come on. The temperature is "perfectly even" I'm told by the woman who is checking me in. I tell her I'm panicking; she asks me where I'm from. "New York City," I say. She gives me a sympathetic look.

I drop my bags off in my room and realize that I don't have a note pad and could use some extra tapes. One of the features for the guests of this hotel is a limo service to the mall a half mile down the road. I get into a stretch limo to go to the discount store to get cheap paper and inexpensive tapes. Surreal.

Back in the hermetically sealed environment, Friday night is open mic night. The show is taking place in one of the ballrooms, down the "virtual" street from the center environment of waterfalls and



Dean Sensui

Judith Sloan: "At the National Women's Comedy Conference, the atmosphere is warm and supportive. I don't find a trace of the nasty, hard-edged cruelty that exists in most comedy clubs."

wrought iron benches. Having been at several open mic nights at comedy clubs years ago, I am truly curious to see if the energy is different. There are about fifty women in the audience.

I say hello to Karen Williams and her lover Cheryl Reed as I walk in to take a seat, and ask if I can record. Cheryl asks me to make sure I say that she's the one who carries Karen's bags...and Karen has a lot of bags. The show is about to begin.

Karen introduces the evening and reminds everyone that this open mic has no music and is warm and supportive. Tracy Rose is emcee. She opens the show and starts what is an uneven night of comedy and schtick. One act does all right; another one bombs. The topics are fairly safe—shopping, dating—until Judith Angelo has the guts to do comedy about depression and Prozac. She is very edgy, talking about how humor comes from pain. She says she heard a study on National Public Radio that concluded that the reason so many

women were depressed was because women's lives were painful. So, she concluded, if you're female and conscious in this culture, you should have a pretty good sense of humor. And if you're a lesbian feminist, the fun never stops. She has a dry delivery that makes her material work. She seems completely tormented. I love her.

Another woman starts talking about blow jobs. ("Wrong crowd," I think.) At one point, the emcee asks how many straight women are in the audience. She doesn't ask about bisexuals. Or trisexuals. She only gives a choice of two categories—how limiting. I raise my hand, choosing to identify with the straight minority; the emcee looks at me and says I don't count. I disagree. In this context I'm straight, though my lesbian life and relationships from my past are what connect me to Karen. There are about ten straight and/or bisexual women all sitting near each other with our hands raised. You know—it takes one to know one.

Part of what sets this open mic apart from those I've been to in comedy clubs is the absence of mean, horrible heckling. I don't find a trace of the nasty, hard-edged cruelty that exists in most comedy clubs. There's some interesting material, too, and I wish there were more participants in this open mic.

After the show, I end up talking to Nancy, a woman who just happens to be staying at this hotel. She's from northern California. Her father is very sick, maybe dying, and she's staying at the hotel for a few weeks and seeing him everyday at the hospital. She tells me how very hard it is. We talk about who we know in California and New York to see if we have anyone in common. I tell her I used to travel a lot. Yeah, festivals, yeah, the Michigan Festival. Have I seen you there? Yeah. Oh, let's see, do you know Nydia Mata? Yes, she says, I know her. I work with her, I say. Now we feel like we know each other. Funny how that is.

Imagine Nancy's surprise to find out there was a women's comedy festival in this very hotel. What are the chances of *that* happening? I tell her I'm sorry about her father. She's looking forward to the show tomorrow night. Two hours of laughter. I'm thinking the whole thing is worth it just for her. I hope I see her again someday.

DAY TWO

I wake up early the next morning to do a radio interview in New York. I promised I would call in to report on the first National Women's Comedy Conference. My husband Warren is hosting a program—a mix of music, commentary, readings, and interviews—on WBAI in New York. It's too early to say much about the conference, so I report on the open mic and the hotel and promise to report back when I get home.

I check out the workshops for the day. Attendees have a choice of topics, including Humor and Writing, Improvisational Comedy, Ethnic Humor, and Speaking With Confidence. I try to bop around to a few.

Karen Williams is leading a straightforward workshop that allows women to talk honestly about the realities of performing stand-up comedy—the hardships, the choices, and the decisions you make along the way.

The most stimulating conversation I witness is taking place in Sara Cytron's workshop on ethnic humor. She gives an example of a song parody that she has performed: instead of "Runaround Sue" she was singing "Lesbian Jew." Sara (who is

Jewish) ended up changing the line after another Jewish woman came up and said she was offended. In the workshop today, she's talking about responsibility and respect for your audience. Everyone is talking about what's over the line, what's insulting, what's overly sensitive in bending to pressure to political correctness. There is a thin line. There is no answer.

It's good to see Sara again. I once did some double bills with her, and she is one of my roommates in this hotel room. She walked in with the *New York Times*. Although she's a real dyke and I'm a het feminist, we have a lot in common. We live in a great city with a horrible new mayor, Giuliani. ("Can you say 'Third Reich,' children? Very good.")

I tell myself I have to stop thinking like this. I haven't been outside the building for eighteen hours. Maybe the controlled atmosphere is getting to me. I think these hotels are a perfect place to trap peo-



Irene Young

Conference organizer Karen Williams envisions an ongoing annual gathering where women of all persuasions can come together and enjoy comedy.

ple and kill them. I look out the door and see the trees blowing in the wind. My first paranoid thought is that it could be a video of wind.

I get ready to emcee for the evening. As usual, I'm worried that there won't be an audience. Luckily, the hall of several hundred (ninety-nine percent women, and ninety-one percent lesbians) starts to fill up. The lineup for the evening includes me, Sherrie Tolliver, Sara Cytron, Suzanne Westenhoefer, and Karen Williams.

I am furiously writing down little notes about each comic, finding out how

they want to be introduced, figuring out the best material for me to do to set them up for their timing. I decide to open the evening with topical political material, material about gays in the military and the military in the military.

Sherrie Tolliver is very funny. She's a Cleveland-based African American stand-up who has opened for Aretha Franklin and Natalie Cole. She began performing at the same time she was pregnant. I worry for her in front of this audience. (She is heterosexual.) But when she talks about her boyfriend, no one hisses. She has great material about family values and the racism inherent in discussions about single mothers, plus some wonderful impressions of suburban squirrels and inner-city squirrels. The audience loves her. Sherrie performs around Cleveland frequently, and is going to be on Black Entertainment Television (BET) soon.

Sara Cytron is next—I know her timing. I'm thrilled to be introducing her, and decide to do a character she loves. (A phone call from my aunt Ethel.) Sara bounds up on stage. She's terrific; I've never seen her so relaxed. Her set is very tight. She doesn't miss a beat. Earlier in the evening she told me she would only do very polished material because her old therapist is in the audience. ("Oh, is that the one in your routine who has heard so much about your family that now she has her own problems with them?") After six years of performing throughout the country and now on television, it's obvious that Sara is coming into her own. The audience is rolling. Everyone needs a break. No one can breathe, including me.

I run into Nancy at intermission. She's beaming. Great, I think. It's true; humor heals sometimes.

It's hard to get everyone back in after intermission. I decide to bullshit on stage for a while until everyone has their tushies seated. Suzanne Westenhoefer is next. We're running late, and I really want to

continued on page 59

ABOUT THE WRITER: *Judith Sloan is a performance activist, writer, and performer. Her articles have appeared in 'The Forward,' 'Her New York,' 'HOT WIRE,' and 'Movement Research.'* Her new show—'A Tattle Tale,' based on the story of a whistle blower in Mississippi—is playing at La Mama in New York City through April 9th. Her one-woman autobiographical play 'Denial of the Fittest' runs through 1995. She'd like to remind everyone in Virginia to vote against Oliver North.

ZRAZY

By Sarah Byng

Dublin, Christmas 1993: I am listening to the radio, and out-lesbian writer Emma Donoghue (*I Know My Own Heart* script, *Stir Fry* novel) is on the air, talking about her most significant memory of 1993. It turns out to be a moment from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival last August when ZRAZY dedicated one of their numbers "to all Irish lesbians living in the States."

ZRAZY is Dubliners Maria Walsh and Carole Nelson, who played Michigan last summer in the wake of performances at London's Gay Pride, Europride in Berlin, and several club gigs in New York.

For Emma, an emigré like so many young Irish women and men, it was a happy reminder of how many Irish lesbians there are at home and abroad, and how great it is that an out lesbian band has made it in Ireland—and beyond. For her, it was a sign that things have really changed.

THE POLITICAL FABRIC OF IRELAND

The political fabric of Ireland has worn thin, and it is women and minorities who are bursting through the holes. When the fancied candidate for the presidency of Ireland withdrew after being embroiled in a political scandal, it was not one of the nominees of the major parties who was elected. Mary Robinson, a civil rights lawyer with a strong record of work on such causes as gay rights and provisions for single mothers, romped home with the victory on a wave of liberal feeling. Minority parties are breaking the stranglehold of the big two; there are more women in the Dáil na hEireann than ever before, one now a leader of her party. [The Dáil is the Irish equivalent of Congress.] In a country with a tiny immigrant population, a Labour Party candidate of South African Indian origins was elected to a whiter-than-white country constituency. (The slogan "You've had the cowboys—now give the Indian a chance!" was a wordplay referring to the fact that "cowboy" in Ireland connotes "political fixers.")

Our out gay senator David Norris's campaign included taking Ireland to the European Court and reached a trium-



phant conclusion last summer when the bill to decriminalize male homosexual acts passed into law. [Lesbian acts were never illegal, by the way.] A new referendum to allow limited divorce is likely soon, and progress has been made on giving women access to abortion information.

Following a recent referendum, Irish law relating to abortion is in chaos. Most Irish women who decide on abortion travel to the UK to get one.

The legal situation regarding abortion information in Ireland is extremely complex. The 1993 referendum gave Irish women the constitutional right to receive information about abortion (and to travel abroad for abortions), but there has been no subsequent legislation to define the parameters of these rights.

Consequently, the injunctions obtained prior to the 1993 referendum against certain counseling services to prevent them from publicizing the helpline number (679-4700) are still in force. It seems unlikely that ZRAZY (or anyone else except the counseling services against whom injunctions have been obtained) could be threatened with legal proceedings for publicizing the number.

However, the practical position is that a huge proportion of the Irish population thinks that abortion is invariably wrong, and some of the organizations which do not hold this view are prevented

by injunction from publicizing the helpline number. It is not illegal for the helpline to operate, but it is not easy for Irish women to find out about it. This is why ZRAZY publicizes it with their song (entitled "679-4700"), at their gigs, and on the cover of their album *give it all up*.

There have been occasions when audience members have walked out when the song has been introduced. (This has also happened when they sing "Cool to be Queer.") What's more, one of the partners in Velo, ZRAZY's record label, refused to handle or promote the album because "679-4700" was included. On the other hand, two radio stations have played the song to highlight the absurdity of the legal situation.

All in all, Ireland is a country no longer prepared to put up with outworn political and social structures and the stranglehold of one of the most reactionary Catholic hierarchies in the world.

ENTER ZRAZY

Progressive ideas are bubbling up through the swamps of the music business. "Macho rock is relegated to the bargain-bins of history," said the Irish rock paper *Hot Press* last year. "The new and vigorous alternatives are gay, female, either or both." The women of ZRAZY were quick to write a letter of reply: "Who

are these 'both' people? Surely we're talking about lesbians...conspicuous in the world of rock and pop by their absence."

Acutely aware that the L-word has been the kiss of death in the music business, ZRAZY nevertheless chose to be out and proud, confident to rely on their musical professionalism and talents. They promptly gave notice to the rock world—and everyone else—with the first line of their single "I'm in Love with Mother Nature" [on the soundsheet in this issue] that "Our music says No! to the last five thousand years."

Has it worked for them? Well, "I'm in Love with Mother Nature" went straight onto the charts with extensive radio, TV, and press coverage. Two videos followed, and they wound up the year with a flourish, winning the *Hot Press* Music Critic's Award for Best New Band.

The single also attracted international attention. It was included on two U.S. compilations of new Irish music—the New York Music Seminar's promotional album and the worldwide Scotti Bros. release *Straight Outta Ireland Vol. II*. Tours in the States, Germany, and Austria followed, and the band was featured in a Franco-German (ARTE) TV documentary on the changing face of Ireland. ZRAZY's style is modern, witty, sexy—a world away from the usual image of Irish mist-iness.

DOING IT ON THEIR OWN

With no major record company willing to come up with a deal—maybe promoting an overtly lesbian band was too much for the big boys?—ZRAZY launched their first, indie-produced album last autumn [*give it all up*] to critical and popular acclaim.

International audiences, from major festivals to avant-garde clubs, have appreciated ZRAZY's eclecticism and sophistication, despite how difficult it is to categorize them. Their musical influences range from jazz, funk, and soul to the rich and distinctive Irish music tradition. They write all their own material, songs of love and sex with a hard political edge. This is music for grown-ups, whatever their sexual orientation. It is music to dance to, but of a variety and depth which reflects the emotional sophistication of the songwriting.

It has been a priority for Maria Walsh and Carole Nelson to retain complete control over their sound. They program their bass and percussion lines to give a rich live feel to match their prowess with instruments and voice. Carole plays keyboards and alto and tenor sax with the assurance of her classical training and the

improvisational flair of her years of jazz-playing. Maria's voice soars and glides; also with a background in jazz, she produces extraordinary vocal sounds, as well as playing occasional flute and blues harp. Both women also use Irish instruments; Carole plays the tin whistle and Maria the bodhrán (Irish drum)—these give a distinctive, almost pagan feel to their work.

The vibrancy of their stage performance had hundreds of women on their feet in Michigan and has entranced audiences everywhere they've gone. Currently touring Ireland, North and South, to promote the album, ZRAZY is also planning tours to Europe and the States in 1994, and a new album is in the pipeline.

Recently, I caught up with Carole and Maria off-duty in a Dublin pub, where they had gone with tin whistle, bongos, and bodhrán, hoping to join in a "session"—one of those informal gatherings of traditional Irish musicians which so delight and surprise visitors from abroad. With their friend and gigging partner Isabel ní Chuireánn (now with Celtic Fusion) on accordion, and the other musicians who had dropped in for the session, they gave us an evening brilliant even by the rigorous standards of Irish traditional music.

The punters gathered round the fire to listen, pints in hand, calling out their appreciation—the craic, as we say, was mighty. ["Craic," roughly translated, means "good time," and is nearly always associated with high spirits, endless conversation, and drink.] When Maria sang an unaccompanied version of the traditional air "She Moves Through the Fair," you could have heard a pin drop.

I've seen these girls in their leather and Lycra playing their sexy, progressive music in cool London clubs, jamming in New York jazz joints, and at major festivals all over the world, and here they were on their home turf, reentering a tradition which sustains their music, bringing it all back home.

ZRAZY can be reached c/o Velo Records, 4 Cross Ave., Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland. (353 1) 283-6535, fax: (353 1) 976719. Check with Goldenrod or Ladyslipper for word of the duo's recordings. •

ABOUT THE WRITER: Sarah Byng is a writer and journalist. She was born in London in 1947 and now lives in Dublin.

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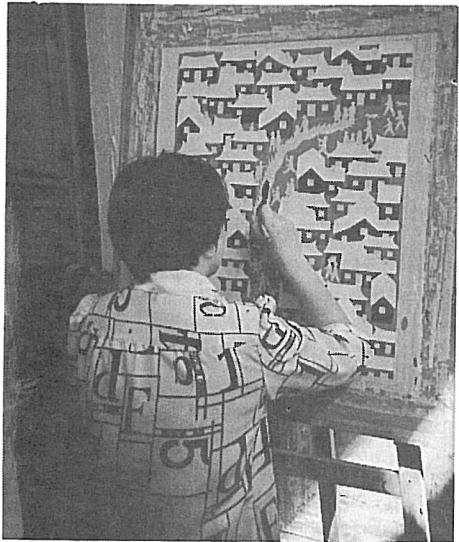
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WOMEN'S MUSIC ON THE HIGH SEAS

By Dr. Bonnie Morris



Bonnie Morris



Bonnie Morris



The hope and beauty reflected in the artistic achievements of women and girls everywhere served as a reminder of strength and cross-cultural optimism. From left: Peasant Art Colony of Jinshan, China. Russian Barbies on display at a male vendor's stand in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), Russia. You can get uniforms for Barbie that are miniaturized replicas from all Soviet military branches. Iban dancer in Borneo at the Nanga Kasit Longhouse in Sarawak, Malaysia.

In the fall of 1993, I had the extraordinary good fortune to sail around the world and serve as women's studies professor aboard the S.S. Universe. Twice a year since 1971, the ship has regularly brought 400-plus college students and faculty from around North America on a global voyage program called "Semester At Sea." The aim of the program (which is sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh) is to offer college students interested in international issues a semester aboard a sort of floating university, combining classroom study with land trips in each port of call.

As faculty, I lived on the ship from September 14 to December 23, teaching both introductory and advanced women's studies courses and an ethnic history seminar. During the fall 1993 voyage we spent four to seven days in each of the countries on our itinerary: Japan, mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, India, Egypt, Turkey, the former Soviet Union, Greece, and Morocco.

I was hired as part of the program's new commitment to global women's issues. In addition to my own courses, I presented regular lectures on feminism to the entire student body of 380 undergradu-

ates, and I planned and led feminist excursions on land. My students and I met with tribal women of Borneo, silk factory workers in China, the women's bookstore collective in Bangalore (India), market women of Morocco, runaway girls in Russia, abandoned/orphaned girls in Turkey, and women's education activists in Athens.

We also had the opportunity to visit a number of performing arts academies where gifted girls were involved in extensive music, dance, or vocal training. Despite the grueling poverty, female infanticide rates, and limitations placed on girl children in nearly every country we visited, the hope and beauty reflected in the artistic achievements of women and girls everywhere served as a reminder of strength and cross-cultural optimism. In the veined hands of women peasant artists in China, in the elaborate facial tattoos of Berber women in rural Morocco, in the songs of Taiwanese girls studying at the Foo Hsing Chinese Opera School, I found a prolific and accessible female culture to experience and learn from. These one hundred days away from my own continent have bolstered my activism in countless new ways.

WOMEN'S MUSIC TO GO

An experience such as this naturally requires extensive preparation beforehand, to say nothing of packing mania on a scale rivaled only by my annual jaunts to the Michigan festival. For me, the delirium of anticipation also had an anxious note as I prepared to leave behind American lesbian culture for four months. I had already made up my mind to be out on the ship as a visible lesbian professor. However, I had no guarantee of encountering other out lesbians, and while I felt certain that some students or faculty might be Goddess Babes, would they be festie-going, *HOT WIRE*-reading women's music buffs?

Thus, while the other professors were busy packing malaria pills, maps, course syllabi, and industrial-strength Lomotil, I spent the entire summer before the voyage making compilation tapes of my favorite women artists. I wanted music selections for every mood. Would the voyage be lonely? Exhilarating? Would there be lesbian space only in the wee confines of my own cabin? By goddess, I'd have music to fit every occasion. My tape player would be my companion and muse.

I began by taping, back to back, the soundsheets from every issue of *HOT WIRE* in my possession. This exercise alone resulted in three ninety-minute tapes, which nicely reflect trends in women's music from the past ten years. Not only were several of these recordings breakthrough releases by artists I now know as friends, but many songs specifically addressed issues I'd be teaching in my women's studies classes. As I guided my students' attention to global misogyny, abuses of female children, and patriarchal structures impeding the eradication of woman-hating laws, I fueled my spiritual commitment to these issues with the lyrics of Susan Herrick's "Heart of That Child" (*Truth and the Lie*) and Alix Dobkin's "Some Boys" (*Never Been Better*).

I also chose to tape a compilation of recordings with specifically international themes, sounds, artists...music which named an international sensibility, or raised questions about women's roles in global politics. On this tape I began with Mimi Baczewska's "Women of the World" (*Turning Tide*) and the Topp Twins' "The President's Men" (*No War in My Heart*), which follows the chain of laborers through the process of making a ready-for-sale blouse.

I also chose recordings of ethnic and cultural survival/solidarity: Mahina Tocker's "Young Maori Woman" (*Clothesline Conversation*), Faith Nolan's "Aleticia" (*Freedom to Love*), and Balkan and Middle Eastern folk songs performed by the groups Libana and Kitka. I also included recordings of resistance from England and Ireland—Ova's "Abseil Away" (*Who Gave Birth to the Universe?*), about lesbian zap actions in response to homophobic Clause 28, and ZRAZY's recent hit "679-4700" (*give it all up*), the phone number in Ireland for information about contraceptives and abortion. [See article about ZRAZY on page 22 in this issue.]

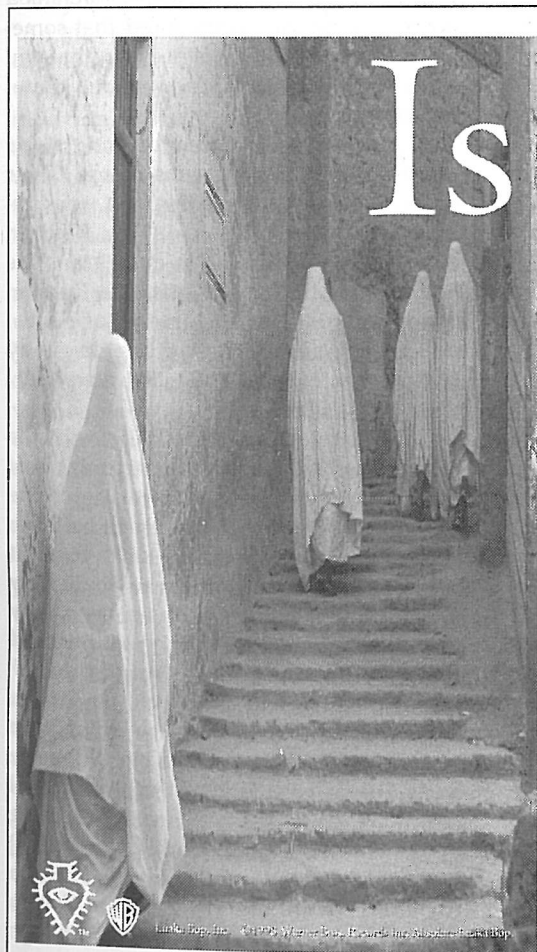
To remind me of my unique role as an observer of other countries, cultures, and issues, I taped several songs by non-American artists presently working in the U.S. women's music scene. My favorites here included Zoë Lewis's commentaries "McAmerica" (*Tired But Inspired*) and "Soup Kitchen Swing" (*Soup Kitchen Swing*), and Heather Bishop's "Anna Mae" (*Walk That Edge*) and "If You Love Freedom" (*A Taste of the Blues*).

Because I would be sailing on rough seas much of the time, I also wanted to make a tape of songs about the ocean or

ocean women: Nancy Vogl's "Seawomon" (*Berkeley Women's Music Collective: Trying To Survive*), the Rude Girls' "Female Rumbling Sailor" (*Rude Awakening*), Cris Williamson's "Ship of Fools" (*Strange Paradise*), and Mimi Baczewska's "Turning Tide." On the B side of this tape I compiled calming instrumental selections to play during storms and sea gales: Kay Gardner's "Lunamuse" (*Mooncircles*), drumming by Barbara Borden (*All Hearts Beating*), and recent instrumental work by Ferron (*Resting With the Question*).

Then I moved on to a more personal compilation effort. As a Jewish lesbian traveling through primarily Muslim countries as well as historically anti-Semitic regions of Russia, I wanted/needed a Jewish lesbian tape affirming my own cultural heritage and commitment to peace in the Middle East. This tape ended up being a unique combination of Yiddish recordings by Alix Dobkin, humorous pieces like Lynn Lavner's "A Mother's Lament" (*I'd* *continued on page 54*

ABOUT THE WRITER: *In between women's festivals, feminist writing projects, and globetrotting, Dr. Bonnie Morris teaches history and women's studies.*



Is it a dream? Is it an omen?

Her family did everything they could to stop her from singing. Everything included threatening her, stalking her, slashing her and imprisoning her, on two continents. They wanted her to live as a traditional Berber woman. She had other plans.

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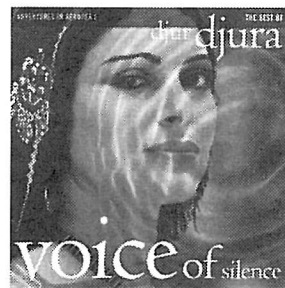
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The World of Two Russian Women Musicians

VERLEN

By Sonja Franeta

It was the summer of 1992, and I had just crossed Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, a lifelong dream of mine. Here I was in St. Petersburg, a city of grand canals and towering ornate buildings, the gateway to "the West."

A friend in Moscow convinced me I should hear Vera Yevushkina and Lena Frolova in concert while I was in the city. So I went to the packed theater and sat through five very similar male poets singing and playing the guitar.

Then large bells were brought to stage right and hung on a big bar. As the stage darkened, two women came out and lit candles. When silence reigned, a bell resonated through the auditorium. Softly another rang out. And slowly, to the strum of guitars, the younger woman began to sing in a clear, rich voice. Then the older woman joined in, breathier and deeper.

The women's voices and performance touched me deeply. Fortunately, my friend had arranged a backstage visit for me, and I managed to connect with Vera and Lena despite the lavish attention they were getting from their (mostly women) fans. I arranged to meet with Vera the following day, thus beginning our friendship.

Vera Yevushkina, forty-two, and Lena Frolova, twenty-four, have been singing together since 1988 in a duet called Verlen. Their style has been influenced by the bard tradition in Russia. This kind of folk singing—putting poetry to music—began in the '60s and became immensely popular as an alternative to the Stalinist propaganda poetry.

Vera and Lena sing, play the guitar, and write music to the poetry of rarely published Russian poets. Recently, they created an hour-long performance piece that focused on the work of Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941). The piece includes slides, and actual church bells are rung to create a mood of meditation and antiquity.

Lena and Vera met thanks to Elena Kambureva, a well-known Russian singer. "In 1988, I went to one of Elena's concerts in Minsk," says Lena. "After the concert, some friends introduced us, and I went to her hotel room to sing for her. She was impressed, and immediately said to me,

'You have to meet Vera Yevushkina when you come to Moscow. Please call me.' She gave me her phone number and Vera's." So Lena and Vera met, and realized they "were meant to sing together."

Vera agrees. "It was very important that we have similar interests in poetry, in music, and an interest in the great poets Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Arseny Tarkovsky, and Osip Mandelstam."

"At the time we began working together," adds Lena, "these poets were being discovered by [Russian] people for the first time. The bard movement was at its height. When I heard Vera's work, I was very impressed, moved. It's rare to meet a person who is right in tune with what you want to express. She was a teacher who opened up not only music to me but also literature."

Vera says the two compose very unpredictably. "We don't just find a beautiful poem and write music to it; we are moved by some feeling and we describe our relationship to the poetry and the world with these compositions. We are instruments—we have to be prepared, our organism receptive. The poems are chosen completely by chance, like a miracle, a flower on a path you walk along. You love a lot of poetry, but suddenly one poem seems to correspond with something in you; it is unique," she says. "Reading poetry nurtures the creative process. You reread the poem that seems right, and it changes with every reading. It grows and becomes more compelling. Then it gets reflected in music."

Lena pinpoints the work of Marina Tsvetaeva as being the initial stimulus of her own artistic expression. "Something happened to me when I began reading her poetry. My soul broke open and began to communicate in response, to sing. I think that she spoke in a way that I couldn't—in words and in poetry," she says.

Vera shares Lena's enthusiasm. "Tsvetaeva doesn't belong to Russian poetry—she is much bigger, she belongs to the world. I know she is not well-known and not much translated, but she is one of our greatest poets. Her poetry is very musical."

Verlen has performed all over Russia,

including Siberia, Kiev, Moscow, and the Urals. In July of 1993, they were invited to perform at the Women's Music Symposium in Berlin. It was the first time they were able to visit the West, and it was their first contact with an audience of feminists, lesbians, and artists. Their performance piece was very well-received.

"We went to the Women's Music Symposium not knowing what to expect," says Lena. "It's hard to present our work because an important aspect of it is understanding the poetry, or at least being familiar with it. I thought it might be boring for people who didn't know Russian—the melodies of the songs might be nice for them to hear, but then what? Sometimes it's hard for people even here [in Russia] to understand our work. But our experience in Berlin was very special. The attention we got was as if people really understood our songs. I became convinced that something higher than language exists, that you can understand somehow without knowing the language."

Vera feels the audience understood intuitively what Verlen was doing. "Their culture needed something that was distinctly Russian," she says. "The Russian word *toska* is difficult to even translate [melancholy, longing]. *Toska* is a Russian condition—a state of lament, of peace, happiness, some inner struggle. They sensed, whatever the song, that it was particularly Russian."

Verlen was impressed also with the efficiency displayed by the organizers of the Symposium. "The organizing of the concerts, I would say, was much better in Germany [than at home]," says Vera. "It was very well done. We got to Berlin only an hour and a half before the concert; they knew the bells had to be hung, and we had to do a sound check. Everything got done."

Lena also had strong praise for the experience. "We were there only three weeks, but it seemed like a big difference from Russia," she says. "When we travel around Russia, it is as if we are in a big desert, an unknown. Everything [in Russia] is so complicated, and nobody cares, so the concerts are always difficult. But in Berlin, people wanted to make things

easier for us. Here, it's been harder for us lately—no one seems to care about this kind of poetry and music anymore. There, I got the feeling that we were needed, our work was valued."

Now that Russia has a market economy, everyone is much more focused on the new material goods, Vera says. This has led the Russian culture to become almost mundane as it becomes less important than buying goods, she adds.

"There are no distinctions; everything is thrown into one pot. This is a very difficult time for people who are involved in art. You can sell a chair or a table—even a musical instrument—but what we do, you can't sell. But there is always a little corridor of people who care about us and our work; they need us and we them, which helps."

Lena points out that the kind of poetry they perform used to be very popular. "It was a political act," she says. "Bards used to sing to convey information that was forbidden, and they expressed things in a veiled or coded way. It was a mass phenomenon, but now there is no need for it. So, many of these artists are just doing other things now."

The only all-woman audience Verlen has had so far was the one in Germany. "They received us very well," says Vera. "An audience of women is always closer, to me anyway. It's very easy to sing for women. Women have a certain spirituality, intuition, a sixth sense. I'm not putting men down—they also have abilities—but women have a certain understanding of the nuances, the subtleties, especially artistic women," she says. "I do love women."

While there are numerous women's music festivals in the U.S., few exist elsewhere in the world. The Symposium was Verlen's first festival. "It was an extraordinary experience for me," says Lena. "The women were so uniquely different from one another—each had her own instrument, a different form of expression, her own style. And it wasn't like being around men where you had to show off in a certain way. There was such a spirit of support and encouragement—they helped one another open up more and more. It was nothing like our Pioneer Camps, where kids get forced to do things they don't want. There was a real gentleness—that woman's gentleness—that helped us so much. We were so nervous and tense, and we didn't know the language. It was very hard, but among these women there was such tact and helpfulness. We're so used to a certain boorishness. We just found it so unusual."

"It was like communism in the best

sense of the word, although I dislike that word these days," agrees Vera. "There was such openness and generosity—people smiled and were helpful. They were so open-hearted."

Lena says, "We felt like children there. With all the language problems, they somehow understood our situation and problems. They know that something's happening in Russia and that it's not that great."

Feminism is something the two women find difficult to define. "I believe the people involved in it are very important and needed—I figured that much out," Lena says. "But anything more than that I was never really interested in. You know, there are a lot of things we never knew about. Here in Russia people just got used to suffering all the time. Someone over there [in Berlin] asked me the question: 'But why, why should society be constructed in such a way that men have it easier than women?' I really never thought about that before."

Vera sees women as capable of leading the societies of the world back from the brink. "I think we are at a certain juncture in society, whether you're looking at



Vera Yevushkina and Lena Frolovo (Verlen). "It's very easy to sing for women. Women have a certain spirituality, intuition, a sixth sense."

Western Europe, the U.S., Latin America, or Russia," she says. "There is a barrier in front of us—either we cross it and plunge into an abyss, or we bring society back to a new life. I think only women are capable of leading society back to a new positive way of life. That's what I think feminism is. At first it may be a pretext for women to get together, but that is important, too. It is vital for women to share each other's work, their new poetry and art, because who else will do this for us but women? In

Russia, you are told to shut your mouth, have children and take care of your family. So it's a wonderful thing that these festivals take place. The women's movement is just beginning in Russia, and it's not clear what form it will take."

Lesbian issues are still mostly considered private business in Russia. "The main thing we have developed here over the years is that one's private life—one's love life—is one's own business. Homosexuality, lesbianism is love. For me, love is spiritual. How can someone go around in Russia and shout on street corners, 'I am a lesbian!?' People have gotten used to a certain modesty about one's private life here," Vera says.

Lena agrees. "You know, I don't believe in clans or groups, we've had so much of that here. I believe that you have inner feelings and thoughts, and that these movements and organizations may be necessary and important, but they are not for me. I write music that expresses my inner self—but political actions and theory?" she ponders. "Maybe there will come a time when I can contribute."

Verlen's future is still as open and unformed as the future of the country in which they live. Vera expects Verlen to be invited again to Germany and also to Austria, where they will participate in festivals and other artist gatherings. "But we have no other plans right now," she says. "Russia is totally unpredictable. No one knows what will happen."

Lena doesn't foresee a specific future for their music. "The thing is, I don't think what I write is music," she says. "I exist as a person, and I express myself. Maybe something lives on. But essentially this is simply like a conversation you remember; these sounds stay in your memory, and if it continues to stay on, it becomes a song. The songs of Jacques Brel live on. You know this is a different level. There are clouds, and there are little drops. There's no need to make yourself bigger than you are. I, for example, write for myself and for my friends, and if they like my songs, they share them with more and more people. Our music just is. It helps us to be real."

To contact Verlen, you can write c/o Vera. However, keep in mind this address is translated from the Cyrillic alphabet, and mail to Russia is not very reliable. 113525 RUSSIA, MOSKVA, ul. DNEPROPETROVSKAYA, g. 17 kv. 109, EVUSHKINA VERA. •

ABOUT THE WRITER: *Sonja Franeta is a writer and translator living in San Francisco.*

The Hensons' Camp Sister Spirit Meets

THE WELCOME WAGON FROM HELL

*Reported by Kim Griffin
and Toni Armstrong Jr.*

On November 8, Brenda Henson's daughter Andrea Gibbs discovered their three-month-old puppy tied to their mailbox, shot in the stomach, with sanitary napkins stuffed under her body. "We got the message loud and clear," says Brenda. "Get out, bitches."

The women who are creating Camp Sister Spirit have been living with around-the-clock fear ever since. They've received dozens of harassing phone calls. They live with shotgun blasts—sometimes nightly—on the periphery of their property, which is located off an old logging road. Men have fired shots near women who are walking in the woods.

HOT WIRE readers and other devotees of women's culture have been following the progress of Brenda and Wanda Henson for several years. [See articles in the January 1990, September 1992, and September 1993 issues of *HOT WIRE*.] In the pre-feminist Deep South where they make their home, they've struggled heroically to overcome bigotry and crushing poverty to raise the money required for the down payment on land they could call their own. *Women's land. Safe land at last.*

Determined to remain in Mississippi if at all possible, Wanda and Brenda investigated every site lead for four years. They steadily collected donations, and the search intensified in 1992 when they were the recipients of a Lesbian Natural Resources grant for approximately \$14,000. When they finally located the 120-acre former pig farm in the tiny town of Overtt (seventy-seven miles off the Gulf Coast), they were ecstatic.

With several buildings, a hilltop site overlooking a ravine, and a price tag of only \$60,000, it seemed perfect. The place would need extensive physical labor to rehab it, they realized, but since "hard work" is the Hensons' middle name, that was no deterrent. Driven by their vision, they bought the land in July.

Ever since, Brenda and Wanda—with the help of community activists from



Brenda and Wanda Henson have staked their claim to women's land in the Deep South, and the hounds of hell couldn't drive them out now.

nearby Biloxi and Gulfport—have been busy transforming the place into Camp Sister Spirit, which they describe as "a feminist educational retreat." They hope to run women's festivals, open a food bank, and operate a literacy program for women on the new land. "This area is so poor," says Brenda, "and one-third of Mississippi women can't read or write." (Both Hensons are working on Ph.D.s in adult education.) Social service providers in southern Mississippi have praised the Hensons' efforts in the mainstream press in recent months, pointing out that the couple have spent the last several years running successful not-for-profit programs to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and shelter battered women.

In addition to finally having a home base from which to run their many programs, the Hensons eagerly anticipated finally having a safe site on which to have their annual Gulf Coast festivals—the only overtly feminist, lesbian-friendly festivals in the Deep South. Each festival has been a struggle, as the Hensons encountered and battled local prejudices that ran the gamut from misogyny to racism to anti-Semitism

to anti-paganism. The festival organizers knew they needed land of their own on which to set up their woman-identified activities. In July, it was looking good. Overtt, here we come.

IDYLIC DREAM TURNS TO NIGHTMARE

The trouble began after a Sister Spirit newsletter containing information about the organization was stolen from their mailbox and distributed throughout the town. The conflict turned violent when they found the pup shot in the stomach and hung over their mailbox.

Occasionally, trespassers with guns have come onto the Sister Spirit property claiming to be "hunting." Mostly, however, the women are harassed by people firing guns close to their property. After finding their little dog, they began locking the lavender cattle gate at the end of their drive.

During the first weekend in December, the Building Bridges, Creating Access lesbian conference was held on the Sister Spirit Camp property. According to Brenda, two drunk men got their pickup truck

stuck at the end of the driveway. Carrying a gun ("with a \$900 scope," one guy bragged), one of the drunks walked up to where the conference participants were. The women surrounded him and escorted him off the property.

At press time, the list of incidents of harassment was three pages long, including having to replace eight truck tires (which kept going flat because of tacks). A neighbor has constructed a shooting range just south of Camp Sister Spirit, which is used as an excuse whenever shots are fired close to the property. They received a death threat on Christmas Eve: "You'll be dead motherfuckers by morning." Thanks to caller ID, the Hensons were able to aid the police in identifying Santa's little helper. The thirty-eight-year-old man confessed; the Hensons pressed charges.

Perhaps most telling, Brenda and Wanda say the police report regarding the dog incident was altered by the sheriff's department. It no longer reflects the two empty shell casings that were found near the mailbox, nor the bullet wounds in the dog, nor anything about her draped position on the box. Instead it says the dog was found in a ditch hit by a car.

The Sister Spirit volunteers now have five guns themselves, but say that none of the women have shooting skills to match those of their neighbors.

"Some nights when there are only five or six of us here, it gets real scary," Brenda says. It's a far cry from the welcoming facade they had envisioned for their new home, but Camp Sister Spirit now has barbed wire strung along the front entrance to the property.

Currently, the Hensons live on the land with carpenter Cheri Michael and Pam Firth (a woman who grew up with Wanda in Pascagoula and moved to the land in mid October). Wanda's twenty-year-old son Arthur moved in with them in December—he plans to stay until it becomes safe—and the New Orleans chapter of the Lesbian Avengers have set up a schedule so that a few extra women are always staying at the farm.

Cheri Michael, who co-produced last year's Gulf Coast festival, had promised the Hensons that if they were ever able to do the impossible—actually find and buy women's land in Mississippi on a shoestring budget—they could count on her to be there. True to her word, she moved to Camp Sister Spirit from Pensacola, Florida, on August 29, and she's sticking it out. (Other women have since left the land.) Cheri says the women's biggest concern has changed from how to renovate/pay

for the property to fearing for their safety.

The women at Camp Sister Spirit say they feel "incredibly isolated." Although they have garnered national media attention and the assistance of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), they do not have enough local support.

NGLTF, citing "an explosive situation," asked Attorney General Janet Reno in December to intervene with the Justice Department's Community Relations Service (CRS), which usually mediates racial disputes. The CRS monitored the situation, but could not intervene because sexual orientation is not yet a protected class in federal civil rights laws. The FBI launched an investigation in mid-January after the Hensons received a death threat by mail, which is a federal offense. The interventions they've received so far do not make the Hensons feel safe, however; they think federal marshalls should be brought to protect them and their land.

THE WELCOME WAGON FROM HELL

To say the least, residents of the tiny community of Ovet (population: 400) do not share the Hensons' enthusiasm for the concept of "women's land." In addition to individual acts of intimidation, they have systematically organized themselves in an attempt to force Brenda and Wanda off the property. Muddying the waters, people from Hattiesburg, Ellisville, and Laurel have come to organize the opposition.

Since November, the tensions have risen in the community, which is predominantly Baptist and steadfastly homophobic. They are determined to keep what they call "lesbian recruiters" out of the Ovet area. (As one male resident put it in the December 20 issue of *Newsweek*: "These people could pick up our little girls and take them to this place and do whatever they want with them.")

Town meetings have been held to plan strategies to get the Camp Sister Spirit out of the area. Paul Walley, the attorney for Perry County Board of Supervisors, is investigating legal means that might be used to force the women from their property, including sodomy and cohabitation laws, as well as building codes.

The organizers of the town meetings have shown parts of an anti-gay video of the March on Washington, and Jones County Sheriff Maurice Hooks passed around the collection plate for the "Ovet Community Defense Fund" at the January 3 meeting. Ministers have taken turns speaking.

In this case, anti-lesbian sentiment is bringing together Southerners across racial lines. Pastor Ken Fairley, an African American minister, told the crowd he was disappointed that the media said a group of "rednecks" had been attacking Camp Sister Spirit. "That concerns me," the pastor said, "because I think there should have been some blacknecks, too." He also emphasized that there was no comparison between the black civil rights movement and that of gays and lesbians.

At press time, the Hensons had not attended any of the town meetings because they did not want to "give credence" to what the community is doing. The town meetings have been well-attended by Ovet residents, media representatives (*20/20*, *The Village Voice*), NGLTF, anti-lesbian organizers from outside the area, and a small number of Camp Sister Spirit supporters.

A handful of gays and lesbians from the area have attended the meetings, including Luis Cintron, a co-founder of the G.L. Friendly gay and lesbian center that opened November 1 in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. "It was like going back in time thirty years to what was happening to other minorities at that time," says Luis, who had to request a police escort for himself and his partner after being harassed. The police reportedly handled the men roughly before escorting them by car to the city limits.

U.S. Representative Mike Parker, a Democrat from Ovet, told a local newspaper that he "agrees totally" with the position taken by the organizers in Ovet. "I do not approve of, nor do I condone, any of the agenda set forth by the Gay and Lesbian Task Force," Parker told the *Laurel Leader-Call*. "He is morally and ethically opposed to what Camp Sister Spirit stands for," say his spokespeople.

At press time, the townspeople had not yet found any legal means to drive the Hensons off their land. Although the community organizers claim they do not advocate using any other means, Robin Kane of NGLTF says she fears violence could be the community members' ultimate resort. "Our concern is that they're going to go outside the law, even if the organizers

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ABOUT THE WRITERS: Kim Griffin is a reporter for 'Windy City Times,' the Chicago gay and lesbian newsweekly. Toni Jr. is a great admirer of the Hensons and urges everyone to send at least a small check or note of encouragement to the women of Camp Sister Spirit at this time.

"WE HAVE EVERYTHING IN COMMON"

A MUSICAL ROUND ROBIN DISCUSSION
as told to Val C. Phoenix

Some of the most fiercely queer and feminist music has come out of the punk scene in the last few years, much of it courtesy of riot grrrl. Yet there's been little overlap between punk and women's music, perhaps due to style and generational barriers. Recently in New York City, a discussion took place that tested that division. Among the participants were three queer riot grrrls who have never been part of the women's music circuit: twenty-six-year-old Jill Reiter from Double Zero; Kathleen Hanna, twenty-five, from Bikini Kill; and Selena Wahng, twenty-eight, from the Lucy Stoners. They met with women's music booster Alix Dobkin, fifty-three, to exchange ideas and discover commonalities. Kay Turner of Girls in the Nose, forty-four, joined in by phone.

JILL REITER: I think the three of us, at least, were kind of raised in the whole punk atmosphere, where a lot of the lyrics are completely women-hating—to the point where to like the music you had to just pretend that it didn't exist that the guy was saying, "Piss on your warm embrace. I just wanna come in your face" [from "Beef Baloney" by Fear]. Or you had to almost identify with that and become completely self-hating. There's this kind of macho thing you had to build inside you to not deal with what the lyrics were saying and how they were affecting you.

KATHLEEN HANNA: I think what's so beautiful about punk rock—or can be really beautiful—is that the process is shown. You can see a band that just started two weeks ago, and they're doing something interesting because they don't know the rules. I always felt like music was totally inaccessible, especially as a woman—I felt like I had to have played guitar in my room in secret for years and years before I could

ever go out. And so to see people who supposedly didn't know what they were doing playing music up there was totally inspirational.

ALIX DOBKIN: Women are notorious for sharing information. One of the reasons I love working at Michigan [Womyn's Music Festival] is because of the attitude of the women there. They care that you learn, and they really want you to succeed. They don't set you up for failure. It may look the same as a boys' event in many ways, but it's very different.

KATHLEEN: I think it's really interesting what you're saying about Michigan being not competitive and being much more based on skill-sharing and stuff. I've had a real problem in the alternative or the punk community because a lot of women are kept really hungry for any kind of criticism, any kind of attention given to their work. It's like, even when we're getting attention that might not be attention that's gonna like further you in any way...

ALIX: ...you're grateful for it.

KATHLEEN: Yeah, you're so grateful for it that a lot of times I see women, including myself, fighting each other for even that negative attention. That's what is really disturbing to me. It makes me wanna hook up more with the stuff you've done and are doing now—because I just can't take it anymore. You know, I can't stand to see us killing each other.

ALIX: It's exhausting. If it doesn't kill you, it'll exhaust you just trying to tread water and stay in one place. And it's so important. You know, for twenty years we've been creating this lesbian-feminist culture that has this terrible reputation for being closed or "politically correct," which is...

KATHLEEN: ...a crock of shit...

ALIX: ...a terrible term. We have something, we've built something, and we need new input. We need everybody—every woman who loves women—to be able to participate in it or contribute to it, and not just do it in these fragmented ways. But we don't have the mass media. I've always said women's mass media is word-of-mouth. That's what the zines are all about. That's what the riot grrrls are all about, right? It's just this one-to-one kind of interaction. It's not Jay Leno.

KATHLEEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

ALIX: It's not Columbia Records; we're not at home there. That's why we've had to do this for ourselves. But we should use what we have established already, and have you all come in and be able to feel at home and do your thing there. It's important.

JILL: I haven't even thought about it much, but it's so sad that like twenty years were spent building this whole women's community, and now there's younger women that somehow don't feel a part of it. It's totally like both sides are just doing their own little thing, and that's really depressing to me. It's just like every ten years there's gonna be like all these separate groups of women, and no one's ever gonna feel connected.

KATHLEEN: That's what building bridges is about, bridges that say...

ALIX: ..."we're here and you're here," and...

KATHLEEN: ...let's pool resources.

SELENA WAHNG: You know, it's really interesting, I think, just how people feel about social change and things like that. We've really grown up with this attitude: like social change is how many people are in your audience—how many people you can sway. In a way—and I think it comes from women's cultures, and very ancient women's cultures, too—you could even just do something very powerful yourself or with a few people, and that can change things. It has reverberations that are kind of undercurrents that affect people. It's really interesting what happened with riot grrrl: It's a small movement, and yet it's been really puffed up in the music media, in the alternative music media.

KATHLEEN: *Mmm-hmm.*

SELENA: It's almost like there are two planes going: the real hyped, sensationalized one and the kernel, the undercurrent.

ALIX: The reality.

SELENA: That's what I really want to keep there. I mean, I kind of see them as two different realities. When you talk to these music industry people, hype is the reality. That's their world. But I really wanna see [riot grrrl] maintain its integrity, and so in a way I'm thinking, well, maybe it needs to go back underground or something.

KATHLEEN: Oh, totally!

SELENA: Like a lot of other movements.
JILL: But in another year it won't be cool, so that means all the people that are really committed and enjoying all the communication that we've been having are just gonna keep doing it.

SELENA: I hope so.

JILL: I hope so, too.

SELENA: I think it's important to strategize, too. In a way it's like a war.

ALIX: Very much like a war.

SELENA: Your analogy of treading water is really key, because you don't want to stay in the same place, and if they try and appropriate something, then it's really important to really think, "Okay, well, we're gonna do something else." There has to be constant subversion. I think it has to be well-planned and organized, too. You know, we have to have control of that. But, I think we can be very clever.

ALIX: Well, we *can* be very clever, and we have righteousness on our side. That's the great thing.

JILL: A lot of people that came to Riot Grrrl NYC had never listened to music before, really. For at least several people this is like the first time they're being exposed to music. A [friend] was saying that the first live bands she saw were all-female, 'cause she was going to all these riot grrrl shows. And then for a few months she was seeing all these dude bands, you know—glam rock and stuff. She thought it was wrong to see all these men onstage. Like she was so used to seeing powerful women onstage, she was like, "Wait a minute!"

KATHLEEN: That's so great.

JILL: She had the reverse experience that most people do when they first start listening to music.

KATHLEEN: Yeah. I was doing a lot of stuff where we were putting on shows in D.C. with mostly women, being around mostly women musicians and doing the riot grrrl convention there. Then I went to a "normal" show, or whatever, and it was really weird.

At a lot of the early riot grrrl shows there was literature being passed around, and people were giving each other addresses and talking between songs. Then I went to this standard rock show—it was three bands in a row, and no one was really talking to each other, and it was mostly men at the show, and I felt really cheated. I was

You know, it's like it's acceptable for young women to be angry as long as they're kind of attacking a male establishment. I think it's really different when you're coming from a totally lesbian and queer place. Instead of being inside the culture attacking male culture, I think that women's music per se within the lesbian community has

really tried to offer a really different view of what the culture could be.

ALIX: That's a great philosophical point about patriarchy: As long as you recognize men as the center of the world, then they'll let you be angry. They're very comfortable with anger.

KAY: Oh, yeah. I think they are, too.

ALIX: They don't mind you hating them, as long as you're paying attention to them. The minute you stop paying attention to them, *that's* when they get upset. And when you start coming from a lesbian place, a place that doesn't put men at the center of your life, that's when they get nervous. It's very different from just being anti-male. You can be anti-male and you're still paying attention to them!

KATHLEEN: Exactly. It's interesting that you said that, Kay, 'cause one of the most popular questions I get asked is how do I expect men to react to the music, and do I feel that I alienate men at shows. The way I usually answer that is "I don't care."

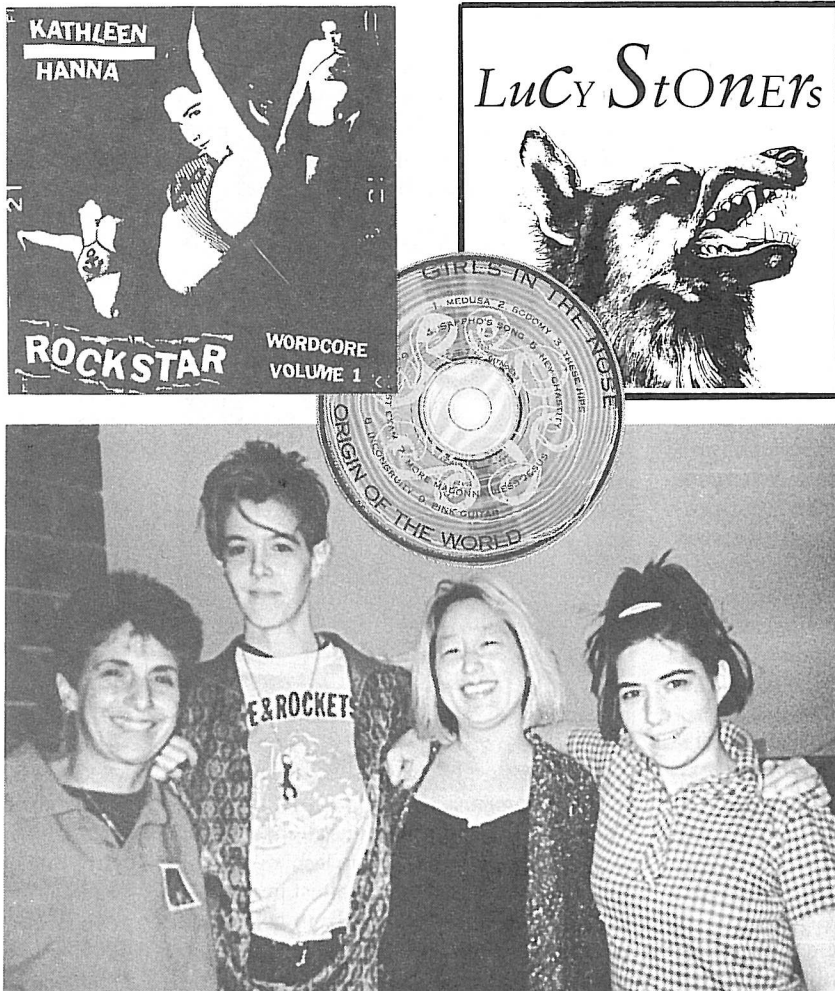
ALIX: "I don't care"... That's the worst thing to them.

KATHLEEN: I should say, "I haven't even

thought about it, because I don't even care."

ALIX: Oh, that's even worse.

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Wimmin and grrrls see eye to eye in New York City. (From left: Alix Dobkin, Jill Reiter, Selena Wahng, and Kathleen Hanna. Photo by Quanta Ray.) "One thing that's really happened with the whole riot grrrl thing is that the straight media and the male media are making angry women look cute," says Kay. "You know, like it's acceptable for young women to be angry as long as they're attacking a male establishment...It's really different when you're coming from a totally lesbian and queer place. Instead of being inside the culture attacking male culture, I think that women's music per se within the lesbian community has tried to offer a really different view of what the culture could be."

actually kind of happy that I was so depressed by the show, because I realized that I wasn't even in that league anymore. There was something else—better—for me now.

[Kay Turner calls in at this point]

KAY: I think one thing that's really happened with the whole riot grrrl thing is that the straight media and the male media are making angry women look cute in a way.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Val C. Phoenix is a lesbian political arts writer living in San Francisco.

THE MAINSTREAMING OF WOMEN'S MUSIC AND CULTURE

By Toni Armstrong Jr., Sara Cytron, Harriet Malinowitz, Laura Post, Sandy Ramsey & Suzanne Westenhofer

As *HOT WIRE* passes the midway point of its tenth year, we find ourselves at a fascinating moment in lesbian feminist history. Over the last two decades, we've built a vibrant subculture of festivals, bookstores, concerts, publications, film/video, radio shows, visual arts, theater, music, and comedy. This subculture now exists simultaneously with feminist consciousness and lesbian visibility beginning to show its face in the mainstream.

In this first half of a two-part article, several women give their opinions in a free-wheeling discussion of the history of lesbian visibility, the phenomenon of lesbian chic, the mainstreaming of women's music and culture, and the impact that mainstream visibility has on "our" women's culture. Today we hear from lesbian feminist stand-up comics Sara ("President Butch") Cytron and Suzanne Westenhofer; comedy writer/academic Harriet Malinowitz; women's music business expert Sandy Ramsey; prolific journalist Laura Post; and *HOT WIRE* managing editor/publisher Toni Armstrong Jr.

HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

TONI JR.: The old "we're everywhere" slogan has turned out to be like the ultimate affirmation, in the [stand-up comic] Linda Moakes sense of the word: "An affirmation when you lie to yourself until it's true."

SARA: There are numerous examples of what I would consider to be the mainstreaming of women's culture. Many of them combine women's culture within a larger lesbian/gay visibility. The TV show *In the Life*, for example, which appears monthly on public television stations across the country, has featured Karen Williams, Suzanne Westenhofer, Lea DeLaria, Kate Clinton, myself, and many others. The 20/20 segment on "Lesbianville" featured footage of the Northampton Lesbians Festival. The *Newsweek* cover story on lesbians made mention of several lesbian performing venues. Of course, Lea and Kate performing on *Arsenio* were breakthroughs. Virtually all of the TV talk shows have sought out lesbian and gay performers; Suzanne and I were guests on the cable show *Real Personal*. CNN's coverage of the rally from the March on Washington for six hours brought numerous lesbian/gay performers and speakers to

the whole country. The list really could go on and on...

SUZANNE: ...including k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge, Janis Ian, and The Indigo Girls all coming out. Also Fem 2 Fem. Kate and I were on Joan Rivers' show; in fact, I've done a lot of television, including *Caroline's Comedy Hour*, *Evening at the Improv*, and *Day One* (ABC). Comedy Central aired *Out There*, the first lesbian/gay comedy special.

LAURA: 1993 certainly was a year of heightened lesbian visibility. From the feature in the *National Enquirer* on Northampton, to the Lesbian Avengers and the Dyke March at the 1993 March on Washington, to the *New York* cover story about lesbian culture, to lesbian characters on *Roseanne*—the word "lesbian" and some lesbian cultural concepts have been put out there for all to acknowledge and appreciate. The few musicians who came out joined those on the lesbian-identified Olivia label, the political Redwood label, and others who were out before it was tolerated, or even safe, to be so. Women's culture exists thanks to the actions of a few determined women who, beginning in the early 1970s, believed in themselves and in other women.

TONI JR.: It's the typical "overnight success" story: We've been building to lesbian chic for the last several decades. Feminist imagery—even lesbian imagery—has been coming in ever-more-explicit doses. Black women blues and jazz performers, particularly beginning in the Harlem Renaissance in the '20s and '30s, were out as lesbians—even cross-dressing, as in the case of Gladys Bentley. How about Marlene Dietrich in the '30s? And contemporary lesbian entertainers are still performing Ma Rainey's "Prove It On Me." The 1950s will be remembered as the Beebo Brinker era; in the 1960s we had *The Children's Hour*. As a young adolescent, I was absolutely spellbound listening to Barbara Gittings speak as an open lesbian on David Susskind's talk show—it was the first time I'd seen a "real live lesbian." And I fixated on the movie *The Group*, which featured a very young Candice "Murphy Brown" Bergen in the role of a lesbian. I wish I'd known about Maxine Feldman's "Angry Atthis," the first lesbian record (1969). I woke up in the '60s, but then the '70s really got my attention! I lapped up everything

that so much as hinted at woman-to-woman love. I remember *The Fox*, *The Killing of Sister George*, several classic homoerotic lesbian vampire films, Laura Nyro's "Emmie," and Lily Tomlin's "Miss Sweeney" routine. I've since learned that Heather Bishop was performing as an out lesbian in the Canadian mainstream. And Janis Ian recorded that female-to-female love song "Maria" in 1978.

SUZANNE: The first time I saw Annie Lennox in a video, I knew it was a woman, but thought, "Oh my god, she's got to be a sistah." There was the character Buddy (Kristy McNichol) on *Family*; she was sort of angst-ridden and not doing well with the boys and wanted to play basketball. I think all lesbians looked at that and went: "My story." I mean, it wasn't really *my* story, but I understood it; I was attracted.

TONI JR.: Things picked up more than even I could keep track of in the 1980s. Androgyny was popularized by Annie Lennox, Grace Jones, and Boy George. Remember how TV shows like *Heart Beat*, *L.A. Law*, and *The Golden Girls* offered well-done lesbian or bisexual characters? Let's not forget Jo (Nancy McKeon) on *The Facts of Life*—although she wasn't portrayed overtly as a lesbian character, she was certainly a tomboy, and then a fairly butchy teen. *The Kathy and Mo Show* began its six-year run, and *Desert Hearts* was widely shown in mainstream venues. In 1988, Tracy Chapman, k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge, Phranc, and Michelle Shocked burst onto the scene in what I think of as "Lesbian Chic Wave 1," except I guess you'd more rightly call it "Androgyny Chic." They were continually lumped together in articles about "the new androgynous woman musician." Anyway, women's music stars have been in such a wide variety of venues—Linda Tillery and Rhiannon toured with Bobby McFerrin; Cris Williamson, Two Nice Girls, and DEUCE played mainstream venues regularly, as did Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert. Homo-friendly feminist Bonnie Raitt gained popularity. And, of course, there were the antics of over-the-edge leather rocker Wendy O. Williams, and Madonna (with Sandra Bernhard) began to publicly flirt with lesbian/bisexual identity. It meant a lot when Whoopi Goldberg won an Oscar for her portrayal of a lesbian in *The Color Purple*, even if it was a watered-

down version of Alice Walker's book.

SUZANNE: Seeing Cris Williamson on the cover of *Ms.* was significant for me.

TONI JR.: These days, you can't even follow it all. In 1990, Meryl Streep gave her oft-quoted famous speech regarding the lack of quality roles for women. We have Sandra Bernhard's recurring character on *Roseanne*, the kiss between two teenage girls on *Picket Fences*, and Vicki Randle every night on *The Tonight Show*. Every other talk show seemingly features lesbians. Feminist rappers Salt 'N' Pepa, Monie Love, and Queen Latifah have earned respect.

LAURA: All of the Olivia Records artists have played Carnegie Hall as solo acts, as part of Olivia's tenth anniversary (Meg and Cris at Carnegie), or in the big fifteenth anniversary show.

TONI JR.: That's one of Olivia's most important contributions: proving that our entertainers—and therefore lesbian feminists in general—were *good* enough and *respectable* enough to play a revered venue like that. Olivia President Judy Dlugacz made sure we gave the kiss of mainstream respectability to ourselves. She didn't wait for someone external to confer it. Many women we know have played Carnegie, from Sweet Honey In The Rock to Alix Dobkin. Holly Near's one-woman show *Fire in the Rain...Singer in the Storm* also played in significant venues and got great reviews. These types of events were pivotal steps toward helping thousands of women believe we can be proud of our culture instead of cowering in the closet or secretively sneaking off to the Michigan woods once a year, telling everyone we're "going camping."

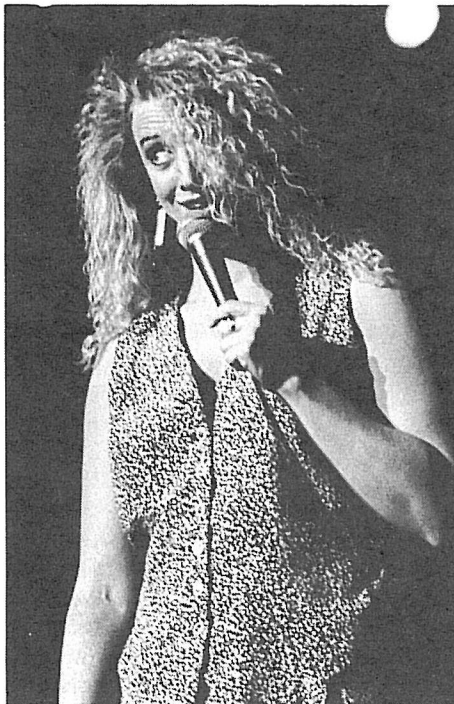
SUZANNE: You know, when Janis Ian's "At Seventeen" came out, I was a thirteen-year-old lesbian experiencing that weird rejection—not fitting in, not knowing. It was happening to me while she was singing it. I was the one standing at the dance and wanting to dance with girls but not having a clue.

SARA: For me, Lily Tomlin was one of the earliest examples of a strong, intelligent, feminist sensibility in the mainstream. I remember being tremendously excited when I saw one of her television specials in the early '80s where she cross-dressed to play a couple of male characters. Part of the performance was making fun of their machismo.

SUZANNE: Yes! Butch drag on network TV! The first time I did a serious double take was in high school when I saw Lily Tomlin doing her lounge singer [Tommy Velour] character. I remember the day—I was at my grandparents' house. It wasn't Lucille Ball pretending to be a guy where you really knew the character was a woman, you know? This was a woman literally looking

like a guy, and she looked *great*. I think Lily Tomlin's hot anyway, and I remember just thinking "Hmmm!" I knew I identified with it, but didn't know why. And it wasn't that I wanted to be a guy, either. Don't you think as a gay person you can remember growing up and seeing people on TV, identifying with them and having no clue why, and eventually finding out they were all gay?

TONI JR.: Definitely. I had a nearly insatiable hunger for lesbian role models, and back in the '70s lesbianism was almost totally



Toni Armstrong Jr.

Suzanne Westenhoefer: "When people know gay people, they're not as prejudiced. Right now they don't know us—they think we're doing weird stuff like levitating our sex partners, having sex with nine-year-olds, and piercing our labias. The reality is, most of us are just trying to meet someone that we'll like."

hidden. It wasn't spoken of, it wasn't shown on TV. Remember, this was just after Stonewall but still before women's music festivals. As Janis Ian points out, when you went looking in the library back then, the most you found were descriptions of the "pathology of homosexuality," usually in deviant psychology textbooks.

SARA: I remember being really impressed that I could buy the book *Rubyfruit Jungle* in a regular bookstore in a mall in suburban Virginia in the late 1970s. I really didn't see any other examples of the mainstreaming of women's culture until the late '80s when k. d. lang and Tracy Chapman made it big. Of course, at that time they were not really out as lesbians.

HARRIET: There's was a kind of "silent out-

ness." Their appearance, image, and song content were obviously a departure from those of traditional feminine singers, i.e., their "signifiers" were different—in lang's case, butch, in Chapman's, political. Yet people could see these and still avoid dealing with their own homophobia. At the same time, lesbians could see them and feel affirmed by how obviously dykey they were.

SARA: This was also the case in Lily Tomlin's Broadway show in the 1980s, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, into which she inserted a couple of Cris Williamson songs. For lesbians who recognized them, it was a thrill. If you didn't know, you didn't realize that lesbian existence was being referred to in the show. But the question is: How subversive or affirmative is any element that is so unarticulated or ambiguous that people can comfortably bypass it or remain oblivious of its presence?

LESBIAN CHIC

SUZANNE: I think the lesbian chic trend began with Madonna. She is mainstream sexy and straight, but she flirted with and was seen with lesbians several years ago. She and Sandra Bernhard appeared as a pseudo-couple on *Letterman*, and after that door was pushed open, actual *lesbians* began popping up. I appeared on the "Lesbians Who Don't Look Like Lesbians" show on Sally Jessy Raphael three years ago. And once k.d. and Melissa came out, we were everywhere. Interesting, though, how it hasn't *really* caused much controversy. I guess some white boy [Bobbitt] getting his peepee cut off is still more exciting.

LAURA: My perception of how this wave of lesbian chic began is that it's directly related to crossing a threshold of visibility. Lesbians amassed a magnitude of performers that simply couldn't be ignored. When lesbian characters began to appear in mainstream settings, as on *Roseanne*, I think that media execs and ad campaigners recognized a new potential market in lesbians.

SANDY: It's a media plot, the attention the media is paying right now to our culture. Not like there's a CIA agent under a bush, not *that* kind of plot, but it's typical media—"Let's figure out a way to sell magazines. Let's take this group that people don't know much about and write about them and make them sound interesting. We'll sell a lot of magazines." And they did.

TONI JR.: The *Newsweek* issue with the lesbian cover was the most-sold issue of 1993. Being a big fan of women's music, I especially liked it when mainstream musicians started coming out.

SANDY: I don't mean to sound harsh, but as a person who's been out most of my adult

life, I'm not so impressed. To me, it rings of opportunism—like, "Oh, it's safe now, I can do it with no consequences to myself." And yet it directs attention towards them and away from other issues. I feel like that's self-serving to a certain degree.

TONI JR.: But is there any value in lesbian celebrities *not* coming out?

SANDY: No, there's no value in their not coming out. But it's how they do it. There are some who've been out all along. Others, like Kathy Najimy, have always been openly supportive. Many people are supportive in their private lives but don't ever speak *publicly* about it. Anyway, I have more feelings of admiration for the average woman who comes out. She does so without any of the cushioning that being a celebrity can provide. In my mind, the average woman is *really* brave to come out.

TONI JR.: Well, I'm glad to see celebrities coming out, whatever their motivation. It can't happen fast enough for me—although I've always strongly opposed the "outing" of celebrities. I'm glad they're voluntarily stepping forward. It was very hard to grow up without role models, except things like *The Children's Hour*, which I saw when I was in the seventh grade. I had a crush on Shirley MacLaine for years after seeing that film.

SANDY: But the whole hero-worship thing is a phenomenon of pop culture. The truth of the matter is, you *did* have role models, but they weren't movie stars. They were people who you at some point in your life met, respected, and learned from. I think that's true whether you're gay or not, no matter what your circumstances are. Pop culture creates an unreality from most people's lives. One of the things that's very interesting about women's culture—and my experience specifically has been with women's music—is that when the so-called pioneers of women's music first started stepping up on stages, it wasn't in front of their fans—it was in front of their *peers*. It was very different from pop culture. Our performers were not the stars that people read about in fan magazines and saw on *Entertainment Tonight* and then got tickets to go see. The performers would go to local communities and would talk to the women—not just sing *to* them or perform *for* them, but talk to them in groups, correspond with them. The performers, audience members, and producers had a lot of contact in the early days, because they were *peers*.

TONI JR.: Yes, hundreds of women pulled together to create the culture and wanted it to be based on feminist principles of equality...cooperation rather than competition.

SANDY: We eventually did create stars out of these performers, though, because that's

what we do in our mainstream culture—and we're part of that bigger culture, however we feel about it. We grew up in this society, and that's a big influence on us. But it didn't start out that way. There's so much value in how women's music began; we don't give recognition that our pioneers—our idols, or however you feel about them—came *from us*. In pop culture, stars are just there; they appear one day because the record company *says* that they're stars.

TONI JR.: Part of the lesbian chic phenomenon is that there's celebrity glitter attached to it—that's part of what's made it so interesting to Jane Q. and John Q. Public.

SARA: Well, the answer to the question of lesbian chic is not so simple. It depends on where you want to begin. You really can't fully separate lesbian visibility from the larger post-Stonewall lesbian and gay liberation movement. The emergence of the concept "gay and lesbian pride," coming out, and the explosion of gay and lesbian organizations and businesses in the '70s are antecedents of the current situation. Also, as the social constructionist historian John D'Emilio points out, lesbians were active in both early gay liberation groups and feminist organizations. The women's liberation movement permeated the country in the 1970s and provided a place for many women to reevaluate their sexuality. As D'Emilio puts it, "Lesbians served as a bridge between the women's movement and gay liberation, and feminists helped to remove gay life and gay politics from the margins of American society." So in the '70s, you have both the gay liberation and the women's movements helping to create an environment where lesbians could begin to affirmatively see their lesbianism not as an unspeakable flaw but as a crucial aspect of their identities. They were able to recognize and collectively articulate the ways in which society is brutally sexist and homophobic.

TONI JR.: I was involved in the student gay liberation movement starting in 1973. There were already radical gay media-watchers back then. I learned my feminism from being involved in the women's culture scene, though. All my energies eventually became focused on cultural activism. I've always thought the creative arts are an excellent way to influence people's perceptions of who we are, to make the politics palatable.

SARA: As the gay movement grew in the '80s, AIDS happened to the gay community, and ACT UP brought a tremendous "in your face" activist visibility to the country's newspapers and TV news shows. Other activist groups, such as Queer Nation and the Lesbian Avengers, were formed as well, and the confrontational style of those organizations

has a lot to do with the fact that today news and feature items about lesbians and gays appear almost daily in the media. More recent precipitating events include the Clinton campaign being confronted by lesbian/gay activists with the immense issue of gays in the military. They brought it into the electoral arena at the same time the gay liberation movement was ready for last year's March on Washington. The growth of our movement by that time, and the enormity of that event, inspired a number of celebrities to come out and for other celebrities to proclaim their support.

TONI JR.: It was wonderful to see Melissa on TV performing at the Inaugural festivities, eh? But you're right; there's been tremendous political activism for "homophile" rights since the 1950s, as is documented in the film *Before Stonewall*. Right now is our special moment, though; lesbians have been singled out to be in the spotlight.

SARA: I'm not really sure why there's a kind of special attention being paid to lesbians. Perhaps because lesbians are not thought of as being as sexual as men, so we are more palatable in some ways to society. Also, our very long-term invisibility has made us more attractive commodities for the media. We seem "new and different" to them.

HARRIET: Gay men have long been associated with the concept and marketing of "chicness" through their real and imagined roles in fashion, hairdressing, decorating, theater, etc.—while lesbians have been considered so un-chic that the mere discovery that we can be chic at all is deemed newsworthy. But aside from this, we have to look at the term "lesbian chic" and what it really conveys about how the mainstream is paying attention to us. For most lesbians, "lesbian chic" is a false category. It's true that a younger generation of lesbians—many of them coming out in cosmopolitan areas or on hip campuses—has challenged the values and aesthetics of the 1970s lesbian feminist crowd, but largely by reappropriating mainstream "feminine" attitudes toward appearance and asserting sexuality (rather than gender solidarity) as the linchpin of what constitutes their lesbian identities. Many of them are indeed "chic-er" than those of us now in our forties or older have probably ever been by popular standards, and they are generally the ones whose photos are used to advertise and demonstrate the new lesbian chicness. It's doubtful that a photo of women from the Michigan Womyn's Festival would be considered chic enough to grace the cover of *Newsweek*. Also, most lesbians, young or old, are still dealing with social, legal, and political outsidership. To use the term "lesbian chic" is to render

superficial lesbian lives and the difficult issues we confront daily. "Chicness" involves money, power, and status; meanwhile, lesbians—along with gay men in most instances—are fighting initiatives around the country to deny us the basic rights of citizens and preclude our access to money, power, and status.

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN'S CULTURE

TONI JR.: I think the legacy of our generation—the women who started women's music and culture as we know it and kept it going for its first twenty difficult years—is that *we created the audience*. We didn't exactly create the stars, because most of them didn't come up through the ranks of women's music. But think of it: We created a huge audience, and that changes our society *forever*. HomoFOEBic types could even kill off all the stars, but they'll never be able to get rid of the whole audience. We've triumphed.

And every woman who's attended a women's festival or an emotionally moving concert, who's read a lesbian book, who's produced a feminist radio show, or gone on a lesbian cruise, or sung in a women's chorus, or been involved in a lesbian feminist publication...we've all been touched *permanently*. These experiences have, over the years, changed the views and expectations of hundreds of thousands of women and, by extension, all the people they come into contact with. By the time k.d. and Melissa were ready to hit the big time, there was a sizable audience out there with a voracious *appetite* for lesbian entertainment, people who were delighted rather than scandalized when Tracy Chapman attended the Grammys dressed in her butch leather, when Martina came out in her autobiography. And the changes are personal as well as political; more pride means less fear, a healthier self-concept, and better relationships with people. Women's culture was absolutely central to my mother and I coming to grips with the lesbian issue in our family.

LAURA: When I came out and talked with my mother about my being a lesbian, her first response was about how lonely I would be in my "chosen" lifestyle. Since I was new to it, I wasn't sure what to say at that point. As time passed and I found myself surrounded with better, closer friends than in my previous life as a heterosexual, I realized that her prophecy was incorrect and attempted to show her so by including her in my life, as I had always done. She resisted coming to any festivals—most were of the camping variety, and my mother is a hard-boiled New York City girl, so I didn't press

her. When the fifteenth Olivia anniversary concert happened, I invited my mother to attend. She'd heard of Carnegie Hall (!) and could get there by NYC public transportation. After attending that event with me and my lover Chris, my mother agreed that the women's culture scene was a positive one, and expressed the wish that she could be part of such a culture.

HARRIET: We also can't underestimate the role women's publishing has had in contributing to lesbian visibility in the mainstream.



Sara Cytron: "Ironically, it's greater acceptance and visibility and the growth of mainstreaming options that threatens the very existence of a separate women's music and culture industry."

Authors such as Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Rita Mae Brown, Sarah Schulman, and Dorothy Allison have had tremendous crossover success. In some cases, their writings have become part of college curricula, and can be found in most well-stocked bookstores.

SARA: In addition, available lesbian writing has been pivotal in affirming and solidifying lesbian identity even in more remote places that lack lesbian social organizations and cultural events. And again, the presence of large numbers of lesbian-identified people, or at least people who have grown more comfortable with the topic of lesbianism, have helped create the interest of marketers in mainstreaming lesbians.

SUZANNE: Cris Williamson and Meg and Teresa [Trull] and Margie [Adam] and Holly etc. walked away from any chance of making it in the mainstream and created—along with others, of course—an entirely new genre of music pretty much for lesbians. What they did was create in the next generation (read: *me*) the idea that we could be out *and* in the real world. They empowered us.

For me, every success I have is directly related to Cris and Kate and the others. They gave me the power. Remember your first women's music concert? I thought I would just lift up and float right out of the auditorium. I truly feel I, we, owe them a tremendous debt. The creation of Olivia Records led to concerts, which led to festivals, which led to bigger concerts and more performers.

LAURA: One group of women that has influenced the new lesbian media visibility are those who, for their own reasons of personality and/or temperament, are the most visible/audible/available. Lea DeLaria falls into this category, and she is also someone who, as a loud, aggressive butch, may be acceptable as a media image of lesbians because she conforms to many people's stereotypes of what a lesbian is. Others have influenced the new media visibility by developing events/products that have come to represent the women's culture community: producers, radio programmers, editors, managers, bookers, techies, writers, etc.

SANDY: We've contributed to the level of professionalism that exists out there, too. For example, women's music provided opportunities for some musicians to have their first studio experiences, to learn what recording is all about. There've been countless workshops for concert producers over the years, at festivals, at IMA, and so on. Many of us have learned how to run businesses with limited finances.

TONI JR.: Many of the businesses that started as a direct result of wanting to promote women's culture—concert production companies, for example—ultimately didn't make a go of it financially. Nonetheless, skills were acquired. This includes technical skills, like recording/live sound engineering, stage management, and desktop publishing. Women have used these new skills to take women's culture beyond the hobby level to the professional level. Small-scale, usually, but professional nonetheless.

LAURA: I've done live-event production, performer promotion, and am currently a freelance writer focused on the feminist cultural network. I've written about lesbian sports, politics, health, and business, as well as the arts. My writings have appeared in more than 100 newspapers, magazines, books, and anthologies in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia. I like to think that my writing has been some part of the increased visibility of lesbians in the media. My hope is that a lesbian reading something that I've written may feel affirmed at the existence of lesbian role models represented in print.

TONI JR.: That's how I feel, too, although
continued on page 44

ON LESBIAN CHIC, COMING OUT, AND CREATIVE FREEDOM

By Janis Ian as told to Toni Armstrong Jr.

From her first hit song being banned to her participation in Howard Stern's recent New Year's Eve special, Janis Ian seems destined to be a lightning rod for controversy. "Society's Child," the 1967 tale of forbidden love between a white teenager and her black boyfriend, took heat from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) even as it catapulted the fifteen-year-old singer/songwriter into the glare of the celebrity spotlight. Janis Joplin used to send her home from parties where drugs were being used, and 'The Tonight Show' asked her to change from pants into a dress before taping. She left the music industry at age eighteen, "tired of arguing about whether I could wear pants, lead a band, play guitar on my own records, or be treated like a full-fledged human."

Janis Ian returned in 1973 when Roberta Flack had a hit with Janis's song "Jesse." Her 1976 album 'Between The Lines' was nominated for five Grammy awards, winning two. (The mega-hit "At Seventeen" came from that album.) She earned another Grammy nomination in 1981 for "Silly Habits" (with Mel Tormé), and moved to Nashville in 1988 to concentrate on writing. Her song "Some People's Lives" became the title cut of Bette Midler's 1990 double-platinum album, and she's contributed songs to several films and TV shows, including 'The Bell Jar,' 'Foxes,' and 'Murder, She Wrote.'

Janis Ian's career, which now spans more than twenty-five years, has included peaks of great popular acclaim and stretches when only her hard-core fans kept up with her music. She returned to performing in 1991, with sold-out tours in Japan, Holland, England, and Ireland, and to recording in 1992 when she made 'Breaking Silence.'

As a fan of women's music, Janis has attended women's festivals and is a long-time reader of 'HOT WIRE.' She recorded the song "Maria"—an overtly female-to-female love song—on 'Miracle Row' in 1978, but since she was in a "not hot" period, the press didn't fuss over it. She decided in 1989 to come out with the release of her next album. After discussions with Urvashi Vaid, then-president of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Janis decided to table any sort of announcement until the album's release, when it was felt the news would be most effective. When



she released 'Breaking Silence' last year, she spoke explicitly to the media as a lesbian, putting an end to the "is she or isn't she?" speculation once and for all.

Janis took many feminist and politically oriented fans by surprise when she appeared on 'The Miss Howard Stern New Year's Pageant,' highlights of which included a contestant smearing ice cream over her own naked body, another singing a dirty tune about Hillary Rodham Clinton, and yet another pouring live maggots into her mouth. According to 'Entertainment Weekly,' the raunchy spoof of traditional beauty contests was one of the most profitable specials in cable history, with 400,000 households paying \$40 each to tune in, for a record entertainment pay-per-view gross of \$16 million. Pushing the envelope of lesbian visibility, 'Newsweek' coined the term "folksbian" in their coverage of Janis's participation in the event.

As a singer/songwriter who is also a lesbian feminist, musicmaking and political activism have shared center stage in Janis Ian's life. She is in a unique position to comment on the recent mainstreaming of lesbian culture in the media.

The "lesbian chic" trend seemed to come out of nowhere; suddenly in 1993 and 1994, the L-word was in so many magazines and on so many TV shows that nobody could keep track of it all.

When *Breaking Silence* came out, I

was accused by some people of using lesbian chic as a promotional angle. I even got an angry letter from a woman saying that it was terrible of me to "exploit lesbianism as a method for obtaining success"—as though being gay is so very popular that just claiming to be a lesbian would guarantee anyone success! (As though I hadn't been out to family, friends, and my local community since I was twenty-one.) I have to wonder why people in our movement pick on each other rather than addressing what's really wrong. Why not use that energy to fight the real enemies?

I think part of the reason for the lesbian chic business is the times; the Reagan/Bush years were very scary for most of us. While many performers were openly lesbian in women's music, it wasn't safe to be out in the mainstream. (I've been trying to get my FBI files since 1986 because I've been told that's a big part of them.) Not to say it's suddenly safe now just because the media is paying attention to lesbians; I still know an awful lot of people who would lose their jobs if they came out.

With the arrival of the 1990s, a new generation came to adulthood and into positions of influence. Many people who were quiet activists in the '60s and '70s are now editors, for example. Having many more openly gay writers and gay media people has made an enormous difference. As more people in those professions have become comfortable with themselves, it's been reflected in what has gotten printed.

Also, vis-à-vis the media lesbian frenzy, I have never yet met a straight man who doesn't want to get into bed with two women. Even though the media isn't presenting us as "bisexual titillation," two women together is a great angle in terms of, say, a *Newsweek* cover. Straight men don't seem to find that threatening. It excites them without scaring them. Sick, right?

I think it's not yet safe for lesbians, but the recent media trend moves us miles ahead. There are real-life out lesbian celebrities now—people like Kate Clinton, Suzanne Westenhoefer, Lea DeLaria.

Lea is an interesting example. I've personally learned an awful lot from watching her, especially about my own

prejudices. The first time I saw Lea perform, she came back for her encore in full drag and I really didn't like it. I had to seriously ask myself *why* I didn't like it. If this is theater, what's wrong with it? I had to really confront my own problems with the whole butch/femme issue, and how people dress, and why it made me uncomfortable.

In the end, I decided I was a bigoted little shit and that I needed to get over it. That's what someone like Lea provides. I object to a lot of what she does, but she makes you examine your own conscience and your own motives, and in that sense I think she's very necessary. She's the polar opposite of a classy upscale broad like Kate Clinton. (I think Kate just hung the moon—she's fabulous.) I haven't seen Suzanne Westenhoefer's current show, but we saw her a couple of times last summer. Suzanne is out there on the front lines with the straight community and Lea is on the front lines with the gay community.

CELEBRITIES COMING OUT NOW

There's a sense on the part of a lot of gay performers that now is the time when we have a real shot at getting civil rights legislation passed—at changing the entire nation's concept of us. Many people are willing to help us, for the first time that I can remember. When I'm doing TV shows now, the focus has switched from "talk to us about being gay" to "oh, and you're gay also, right?" That's a huge difference.

Visibility is one of the main benefits of the mainstreaming of women's culture. I don't doubt that if I were eighteen now I'd be starting my career as a "Jewish/gay/folksinger-songwriter." I was always seen with my partner when I attended functions like the Grammys; I made no secret of it—and all of that contributed to a strange kind of visibility. When I was fourteen, it wasn't even possible to consider being gay without thinking of Radclyffe Hall and assuming you'd have to cross-dress. When I went to look for anything about myself in the library when I was eleven, all I found was *The Well of Loneliness*, *Cities of Night*, and a couple of books on curing homosexuals and the pathology of same-sex attraction.

There are lots more choices today, and it bothers me when the generation coming up discounts people like Elton John for "not coming out soon enough." For God's sake, we were on the front lines in a million issues that aren't relevant anymore solely because we fought them!

Most of us who've come out recently

weren't comfortable being "in." The media had always been good to me, and I found the evasions humiliating. I've never been "in" the way some people I know have lived—you know, separate bedrooms and so on. I've never been capable of that. But until recently I've never wanted the media exposure and spotlight on that area of my life.

That wasn't cowardice—it was knowledge of what media spotlights *do* to you. For instance, my partner, who enjoys anonymity, is no longer able to have that; her name and her photo are public record now.

Also, people reinterpret songs in ridiculous ways, such as insisting to me that "Jesse" is about a woman. (Damn it, if I'd wanted it to be a woman I'd have spelled it "Jessie"!) I grew up in a fishbowl where everything I wrote was minutely examined to see what I "really" meant. When I was a kid ("Society's Child" was a hit when I was fifteen), everyone was counting on my work to predict what The Youth were feeling.

I honestly believe that art has the power to change the world, to change your life, and there's nothing more detestable to me as an artist than the pigeonholing of someone's work into neat categories that fit with people's need to fulfill their own personal agendas. I would hate it if *anyone* felt excluded from sharing in the emotions of "At Seventeen," and in that sense I discourage gay people from thinking the song belongs only to them—just as I would discourage bad dancers from thinking the same. No one has a corner on alienation.

Still, being in the closet through lies of omission didn't feel good at all. I knew that if I began recording again I'd come out; the only question was *when* to do it. Given the importance of some of my work to teenagers, Urvashi Vaid felt the best thing I could do was make as big a media splash as possible, try to head off some of the teen suicides, and present a positive image. I've tried really hard to respond to letters and calls from parents of gay kids with an attitude of "Hey, I'm gay and living in a stable relationship, with a good job, so it's not what you think!"

The "when" aspect of my public coming out was tricky. My management and I had decided back in 1989 that I would come out with the release of the new album. *Breaking Silence* was finished and ready to be released in June 1992, but we couldn't find a U.S. company that would release it. Because of that—and only because of that—I ended up coming out to the press after k.d. lang and Melissa Ether-

idge. It's not that being first is so important, but I really don't want anyone thinking that their coming out publicly had anything to do with mine.

To be presented as having jumped on a bandwagon would take away from my integrity and that of the group of very straight business people who were willing to forge ahead along a path no one else in mainstream female pop had yet trod. Also, I've been told by reliable sources that a big part of the reason we had trouble finding a major label to release *Breaking Silence* was that we presented the album and the "outing myself" concurrently. It's always ironic to me that accidents of fate such as this conspire to create assumptions that are patently untrue.

If I'd come out totally when I was younger, I think things would have been very different for me. I probably wouldn't have gotten married for starts, even though I was very much in love with him. The 1990s is a *great* time to be twenty years old. Gosh, even in high school you could maybe be gay now! There's open support here and there. What a concept. I was talking with Lea DeLaria on a street corner in P-town; my partner and I were watching some little baby butches running up to each other and asking for dates, and we're going, "Good Lord!" I mean, none of them were worried about things like violence or shame. Lea said, "Don't you understand? That's what we've given them."

THE "FOLKSBIAN" RINGS IN THE NEW YEAR

Howard Stern's show was a very interesting experience for me. Interviewers have really ragged me about being on it. But most of the people I've had this discussion with have not seen or heard Howard's shows—they're coming from only having heard sound bites.

One thing I want to point out about my experience is that out of the entire mainstream entertainment industry—out of everyone I've dealt with who says that they love my music—the only performers who've put their money where their mouths are have been John Mellencamp and Howard Stern.

When talking about my participation in Howard's *Pageant*, let's start with the fact that I personally don't believe that pornography contributes to violence (with the exception of pornography involving children). Let's take that one step further and say that I'm mightily confused by the number of women who feel that there's something wrong with what Howard did

and yet go on blithely reading Anne Rice's erotica, which I personally find to be incredibly objectionable.

I've taken a lot of flak for participating in something that "dehumanized" the women participants. I find that to be an unbelievably condescending attitude toward the women on the show. If this were a group of upper-class, educated women, I don't think I'd be hearing that kind of bullshit. The fact that most of these women were apparently from a specific socio-economic status contributes to the assumption that they're not competent to make choices for themselves. I find *that* really offensive, particularly living now in the South, in a smaller community, where I've met people who are functionally illiterate. They can't throw around the reference points that I can, but they'd jump down my throat if I said to them they didn't have the right to participate or not participate in anything.

I view the whole thing as an issue of choice. Some critics have said I participated in something that contributes to violence towards women, and that the women on the show were victims who didn't know what they were doing. But I don't agree with that viewpoint, or I never would have been on the show. The way I see it, we all come to a point where we have to say, "My life, and responsibility for it, are in my own hands." We have to allow each other that decision-making power as well.

Now, within the question of dignity, did I find the show to be stupid? Disgusting? Yes, yes. Do I find Howard stupid and disgusting at moments? Oh, yes. I also find Howard to be real ethical, especially about children. When Rush Limbaugh came out against Chelsea Clinton and started making fun of the way she looks, for example, Howard Stern ripped him to shreds. He doesn't allow children in the studio. He feels that there's nothing wrong with adults doing what adults want to do—you can always change the channel—but it's an adult's choice. You have no right to subject a child to it, because the child doesn't have the same choices. And I agree with that a hundred percent.

When I was a kid, there were a lot of choices I didn't even know I had—other people were making most of the decisions for me. Doing this show was one of the few things in my life as a performer that I got to do that was just fun. It was fun to sing with Howard and to meet a bunch of people that I would ordinarily never get to meet. It was fun for me to participate in a New Year's Eve show, something I've never had the chance to do before.

I had a lot of concerns beforehand, though; it's not something I took on lightly. I didn't really care if he's disgusting; that didn't bother me. My major concern was, would I be doing something that denigrates women?

Actually, I had a similar question when I wrote "Ride Me Like a Wave." Is it denigrating women to sing a very frankly erotic song for audiences that are com-



Janis Ian's first record was banned by radio because of its controversial nature. It wasn't until Leonard Bernstein featured her on his TV special and called her a "marvelous creature" that "Society's Child" became a top-ten hit. *The Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson (above) asked her to change from pants into a dress before taping.

posed of fans, a certain percentage of whom are probably fantasizing about me at that very moment? I mean, I perform in a cat suit and tux top—I'm not up there in blue jeans and a torn T-shirt. How far can you carry it? At what point does it stop being erotic and start being pornographic? These are vital questions to me—not that I'd equate Howard's show with anything erotic. Nor would he. That's the point.

One of the irritants in the knee-jerk reactions some people have had to my appearing on Howard's show is the assumption that I blithely took it on without thinking twice. Do I really have to defend myself as someone who takes morality and ethics seriously, after all the years I spent paying the price for doing so? Well, yeah, if I really think about it, I guess I should have to—no one should be allowed the luxury of in-

stant approbation just because of their past.

I had no female role models outside of my family when I was growing up; certainly no lesbian role models. There weren't women around me doing what I was doing—writing, singing, leading the band. That was something the guys did. My parents raised me to think I could be anything, so the gender issue didn't really exist for me. I found it silly and time-wasting. But as I grow older now and I see the wonderful role models we've created—people like Jewelle Gomez, for instance, or Martina—I realize what a void that lack left in my life. So my own position is one I take very seriously. I don't make light for an instant of the ethical choices I as a performer have to make.

A reality of my professional life is that nobody in New York plays my records as quickly as Howard does. He was one of the first to jump on my album and to say, "Hey, they're not playing this because she's forty-two and she's a lesbian." He's in the front lines of saying *the airwaves need to be free*, and if there's any bottom line to the whole Howard Stern thing with me, it comes down to that. I think any lesbian or feminist with a non-mainstream message in her music should be concerned about the FCC instead of biting off each other's hind legs!

Should I have done this particular New Year's Eve show or not? I can argue both sides. But the bottom line is that the FCC is trying to close him down. [The agency has already fined Howard Stern's bosses, Infinity Broadcasting Corporation, \$1.2 million in indecency fines. According to *Entertainment Weekly*, the FCC has suggested that Infinity may be prevented from buying additional radio stations.] I know what that's like—the FCC tried to close *me* down with "Society's Child." Back then, stations had their licenses threatened, and one station was even burned to the ground for playing it.

I grew up in a family of activists, with the FBI at their door demanding information, and Minutemen planting bombs in the camp my folks ran. I have no patience with *any* sort of censorship of the arts. To me, Howard Stern is the guy who says, "Yeah we'll play 'Society's Child' even if the station burns."

People call in and say, "You're ruining morals for my children"—it's the same words I heard when I was fifteen. Today, the same kind of people scream about degenerating morals whenever lesbians are portrayed in a positive light on TV or in the movies.

As an artist, my work belongs to me,

and I would brook no interference with my lyrics, my music, my recording. As a human being, I try to see my life within the context of history and the world at large. I believe we *have to* support one another's diversity—and just as we insist that people of color be included, I don't think we can afford to *exclude* people who, say, are more concerned with their art than their politics, or are fighting along different fronts. I personally don't like exclusionary politics on any level, whether as Jew-versus-them, gay-versus-them, white-versus-them, second-generation American, short-person, dark-haired...whatever you can find that bands you together with one group and separates you from another.

In that context, I would hope to be open to the Howard Sterns of the world, who at least are operating from a theater of honesty. To me it's a very small controversy that will pass, just like the arguments I had years ago over whether I should do only civil rights pro bono appearances or do bigger, for-pay shows during the "Society's Child" years, or whether I should perform "American music for Americans" during the "At Seventeen" years when I spent time abroad.

Ultimately, you can't judge a life until it's over. Everything passes, and at the end of my day the work is what's important. •



M. Kemmisaki

"The 1990s is a great time to be twenty years old," says Janis Ian. "Gosh, even in high school you could maybe be gay now! There's open support here and there. What a concept. I was talking with Lea DeLaria on a street corner in P-town. My partner and I were watching some little baby butches running up to each other and asking for dates, and we're going, 'Good Lord!' I mean, none of them were worried about things like violence or shame. Lea said, 'Don't you understand? That's what we've given them.'"

ABOUT THE WRITERS: Janis Ian was born April 7, 1951, on a New Jersey chicken farm where her parents worked. The 1967 Newport Folk Festival voted her too young to perform, but in 1968 Pete Seeger sent her "a lovely apology" and she went. Janis has never recorded any song she didn't write or co-write, even though it meant turning down "You Light Up My Life" and the film 'The Graduate.' The instrumental version of "At Seventeen" is often heard in elevators and McDonald's restaurants, but no other singer has recorded it. Two signs hung on the studio door during the recording of 'Breaking Silence': "You have **nothing** left to lose," and "If you're not pushing the envelope, what are you doing in my studio?"....Toni Armstrong Jr. has been involved in women's music and culture since 1975. In addition to being the publisher/managing editor of 'HOT WIRE,' she is a photographer and works by day in the field of special education. She has been publishing the 'Women's Music Plus' directory of resources in women's music and culture since 1977. The sign over Toni's desk is a quote from feminist media guru Donna Allen: "I could have been out earning a lot of money, but what do I want with money? I'd probably just have given it away to the people doing this work."

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The Life and Musical Times of

JAY ALLBRIGHT

By Cheryl Miller and Toni Armstrong Jr.

When Regina Jay Allbright was growing up in Brooklyn during the 1940s, Harlem was alive and vibrant with the electric sound of musical creativity. In a career that has spanned four decades, this jazz keyboardist has performed with Etta Jones, Errol Garner, Jackie "Moms" Mabley, Charlie "Bird" Parker, Dinah Washington, Lionel Hampton, and dozens of other jazz greats. She toured with The Four Jewels of Jazz, a band that started after the International Sweethearts of Rhythm broke up. This modern-day musical foremother has stayed with the music decade after decade—has done it all—and today is performing jazz with her daughter Punky as The Sugar Hill Duo.

Jazz has been in and around R. Jay Allbright since her New York childhood. "In the Bedford Stuyvesant area, we had people like Max Roach [Uptown String Quartet] and Duke Jordan," Jay recalls. "Charlie Parker's whole rhythm section seemed to come from Brooklyn. We had clubs there where Billie Holiday was given awards. In Brooklyn, I could sneak into these places and get back home before my mother knew I was out of the house. We grew up having what people today call 'jazz giants' in the neighborhood. Miles belonged to us. It was our business what they did and how they behaved."

Jay has always loved jazz and boogie woogie. She began playing professionally at the age of eight, and when she was young—about ten or eleven—she won for the first time at the Apollo Amateur Hour with two of her friends. "Different women's organizations in New York City gave dances which talented children were allowed to be a part of," she says. "Part of the show would include me and all my other little friends who could tap dance or sing, as well as some of the Katherine Dunham dancers. The musicians that were playing could be anybody from Thelonius Monk to Buddy Tate."

Performing was an intrinsic part of Jay Allbright's childhood. ("It was all I did," she says.) During this period, there were gang war problems in Harlem and in Brooklyn, and the Police Athletic League started sponsoring amateur hours. They



R. Jay Allbright and her daughter Punky. "Becoming what you'd call a 'star' was never—and still isn't—a part of my agenda," she says. "It was always about playing at some jazz club—just playing the music, keeping up to date with what was going on."

utilized Jay's talents to draw attention to their productions so they could work with street kids who were in trouble. Adam Clayton Powell also included Jay in large benefits that he was producing, which starred Billie Holiday, Pearl Bailey, and other black entertainers.

"So I came in contact with a lot of people," says Jay. "I told Billie Holiday I was a pianist, and she didn't give me any reason to think that she didn't believe me. She always respected me for being this little musician kid that was always gonna be bugging her. Even up and through my teenage years, I was around and in and out of her life when she worked New York. I think she expected me to pop up out of nowhere wherever she was, and that's pretty much what I did. That was just part of the picture of New York, of Brooklyn, at that time."

When Jay won that first Apollo Amateur Hour, she knew she wanted to be a

jazz musician, though she says she never had any visions of becoming a celebrity. "Becoming what you'd call a 'star' was never—and still isn't—a part of my agenda," she says. "It was always about playing at some jazz club—just playing the music, keeping up to date with what was going on. As a child, I was always accepted as one of the younger people in the music. Older musicians would let us play for awhile and then kick us off the bandstand when they were ready to go on. Consequently, I always had a sense of belonging. Today, I don't think musicians get to experience that feeling of belonging, particularly the young musicians."

Jay started playing away from home during the World War II years. Promoters would call her mother to ask if the young pianist could play at nearby army bases in New Jersey or Long Island. At the end of the '40s, she left New York for Atlantic City, following some of the women who'd

been in the International Sweethearts of Rhythm when that big band broke up.

"I had an understanding with one of the ladies who ran the Apollo Amateur Hour," she says. "When I needed some extra bucks, I would go there on Wednesday night and beg to play, and I would usually win. I took some of that money and followed the Sweethearts to Atlantic City. I got work immediately, so I stayed for a couple of years. Myrtle Young put together a band, and I went on the road with them." Ultimately, Gloria Bell (bass), Hettie Mary Smith (drums), Willene Barton (sax), and Jay became The Four Jewels of Jazz.

The new group's first stop was right back in Atlantic City. "I had struck up a friendly relationship with Sammy Davis's mother, who would let me practice in the club early in the morning because I didn't have my own piano at the time. So when the well-known musicians in Atlantic City—like Wild Bill Davis and Bobby Tucker, Billie Holiday's pianist—would finish at 4 a.m., I could play."

Atlantic City became like a home base to Jay and the Jewels in the early 1950s. They worked there a month or two out of every year. "By that time, we were signed up with an agency, like most of the bands that came out of the Sweethearts of Rhythm," she says. "We were traveling all the time. Wherever we played, we attracted other big-name stars because of the quality of our music. They would sit in and play with us, people like Lionel Hampton and Lockjaw Davis and Arthur Prysock—well-known people who were traveling on the black music circuit, what was then called the Chitlin Circuit. We would generally do at least a month out of the year in places like Buffalo, Atlantic City, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Providence, Rhode Island."

As in the women's music circuit of the last two decades, the lifestyle was a highly interactive one that led to constantly meeting new people—fans, other musicians, and supportive community members. "After we'd get through playing, people would just kidnap us, feed us, and keep us, especially if we were going to be jamming and whatnot," Jay recalls. "At that time, where we were traveling and playing we often couldn't eat in restaurants or hotels because of segregation. So black families would house us and feed us. We weren't welcomed into—or could not afford—the better hotels, so we were always housed with black families who were signed up with the agencies."

Jay left the changing Atlantic City scene in the early '50s. "By then, every-

body was back in New York. Most of the clubs that had been hiring musicians at the time went to another kind of music, or they changed to recorded music. It was mostly due to economics, I think," she says. "A great many bands were cut out completely. A lot of the clubs replaced their pianos with organs, so many of us pianists had to become organists. This usually cut out the bass player and maybe the guitar player." Many former bands became organ trios.

LIFE AS A JAZZ WOMAN

"So I'm back in New York and establishing myself without a piano, trying to get the organ sound down," Jay says. "My daughter Punky's godmother introduced me to Mary Lou Williams's brother Jerry. He took me to meet his sister, who he said was also a musician. He didn't tell me who his sister was—or maybe I hadn't paid attention—but I was thinking we were just going to hang out and jam. He took me to this woman's house, and I'm blown away because it's *Mary Lou Williams* standing there in the door. Apparently, she knew I was coming, and that he expected her to do something about the fact that I was working in a factory and had blown my [music] union card. I played for her, and when I snuck a peek at her, to my amazement she was tapping her foot. I knew I had it made."

Jay quit her day gig soon after. "Mary Lou shipped me off to an Air Force base in Greenland, up above Alaska, for about a month to just focus on the music, on entertaining. It was an Air Force base that was on an icecap. Can you imagine? In the middle of the summer, and she ships me off to an icecap to play for the Air Force and practice all day long!" Jay says. "By the time I got back, she had called the head of Local 802, and I got my union card back."

Mary Lou was playing at the Wells nightclub and restaurant on Seventh Avenue. "It was a basic jazz establishment that served fried chicken and waffles at six o'clock in the morning, as well as the best jazz in Harlem," says Jay. "She got a gig for me upstairs on the weekends, while she played downstairs. She was happy with the fact that I had a woman—Elaine Leighton, a young, unbelievably talented jazz drummer—with me. Over the years, I've tried to find Elaine. I know she moved to Indiana with her husband, but I don't even know whether she's still alive. I've called different unions in Indiana, but I've never been able to locate her. Maybe she'll see this article, or somebody who knows her will get in touch with me. Anyway, Mary

Lou got me back on the road to playing for I don't know how many years, until the playing stopped after my move to Cincinnati in the 1970s go-go era, when once again live music was replaced by recorded music."

After the Wells, Jay became a well-established New York musician. She led house bands at the Club Baby Grand and at the Club Cherry Hill. She played at the big hotels in the Catskill Mountains, and was steadily employed, usually as the leader of a group. "By the late '50s and early '60s, I was working with all-male groups," she says. "We [women musicians] all seemed to have scattered. Gloria Bell, who was the bass player with the Four Jewels, became a jazz organist. At that time, she had her own group working, I think, mostly in Jersey. Willeen Barton, the saxophonist, hooked up with a jazz organist, and then she started doing the European circuit."

According to Jay, women were not really appreciated by the jazz critics or by the jazz population in the U.S. "As well known as Mary Lou Williams was, she still was not as well accepted as any one of the male jazz musicians here in America. Of course in Europe she was like royalty. Still, there were people in the U.S. like Ellington and Quincy Jones who were some of the Four Jewels' main supporters. They always validated our abilities," she says.

What was it like, making her way as a woman in this climate?

"I was always given what the men thought was just the absolute greatest, highest praise: 'Well, Jay's okay, she plays like a man.' I was accepted with the men because I played 'like a man,' meaning they thought I was qualified—which a 'woman musician' obviously couldn't be. One of my teachers told me that I made some men uncomfortable without being aware of it because of my natural ability to play, because I was not formally trained. Others felt that the music was simply for men—a vehicle for men to express themselves, perhaps to get in touch with their own feminine side. Some saw the music as a woman; Ellington once said, 'Music is my mistress.' Jazz in particular is descriptive of the black female. And so they thought that they were the only ones entitled to adore her. I felt I needed to validate or define myself at that particular time as also having the right to adore the black female, since she was my mother and my sister and myself. I certainly had as much right as they did, or perhaps even more so, to express the music. I *was* that black female."

Jay has always found jazz to be comforting as well as exciting. "It's very nourishing, womanly. It brings what a mother brings to you, and it brings the sensuality and warmth of the black female. I don't care who plays it—that's what they appear to be trying to describe through the use of the horn or the keyboard or even the drum: the heartbeat of the female. I certainly had a right to be able to express my version of it, being that woman, and a sister of that woman, or the mother or the child of that woman."

In Jay's experience, there was more cooperation than competition between the female jazz musicians of the day. "I'm sure there were cat fights and whatnot among the larger organizations, but we as black women had to fight so many other things," Jay says. "For example, we had to get legislation from Local 802 so that when we went into a club, it was established with the owner and the bartenders that we were not there to sell the whiskey or to drink with the men. We were there simply to perform an art form, just as the male musicians did."

Many club owners felt that women musicians were somehow breaking the contract if they did not want to drink with the male customers. Jay, who was sometimes the only band member who drank, never allowed male audience members to buy her drinks. "Quite often it caused problems for me and my bandleader, because I would go to the bar and buy a drink and would refuse to let someone pay for it," she recalls. "If they didn't want to discuss music or my performance, I didn't have anything to say to them. My performance was my main thing; that's all I was there for. Since I had no interest in becoming a star, they really had nothing to offer me other than their interest in my abilities as a musician. Quite naturally I wasn't all that popular with some of the owners."

This was finally resolved when the musicians' booking agents got statements from Local 802. "Eventually it was printed up in the Local 802 paper, not to expect women musicians to be anything other than women musicians," Jay says. "I cut the article out and carried it with me to the different clubs. I'd say, 'Here, look, I don't care what you expect, this is what Local 802 of the AFL-CIO says.'"

The extreme racially segregated conditions of the era led to a type of camaraderie among musicians that Jay doesn't find today. "We were black, and so we often didn't have access to proper food due to segregation," she says, "but a few of the towns did have black hotels. We

would all be in one big hotel, networking and hanging with the people that we were really impressed with. So there were some advantages to those times. If I go out of town now, more than likely I stay at a large white hotel—never getting to see who's in town after work."

Jay has particularly vivid memories of those years in the 1950s and 1960s. "In Philadelphia, at the Douglas, you'd get up to go to the bathroom and run into Lester Young. Lord, Lester was the epitome of the jazz musician. Bumping into him in the morning in his shorts and his hat was quite an event for any jazz musician, either male or female. Waiting for the bathroom with Lockjaw Davis turned out to be an incident that I remember fondly, too. He and I became friends while standing outside the bathroom. That was some life—you couldn't even have your own private bathroom, but you could become intimate almost immediately with people that you had always aspired to meet, get their autograph. So those conditions did have their advantages."

Music and American society both changed rapidly during those years because of the civil rights movement. "I was on tour during the assassinations and burnings," she says. "Many of the clubs we'd played were burned, from Omaha to New York City. Sometimes the air was thick with black smoke," she recalls. "It seemed like hope just died out of the black community with the loss of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Kennedys—it seemed like everybody was being assassinated then. And the music, the live music itself, really went out again."

THE '70s AND S.C.A.T.

In the 1970s, Jay went to work at the Club Galaxy in Newport, Kentucky, leading a house band playing for strippers six and seven nights a week. "Movie stars whose careers had fallen by the wayside were dancers there—even Brigitte Bardot's sister. Some were extremely good, and had huge, highly costumed acts. We had some fun; we hung around with Morgana, who was pretty famous—she even appeared on *The Tonight Show*," she says.

"But it was hard. Other musicians had been out of work for two years, but I was still working as an organist. The fact that I could play more than the piano saved my life, as well as allowed me to maintain my home. Finally, the Galaxy shut down as go-go music and that kind of thing came in."

In the late 1970s, Jay turned her

talent and attention to music therapy. "Musicians were really drinking heavily, to the point where it became a problem, because there was nothing else you could do. Drinking was no longer just a social thing," she says. "I looked at having to change my own lifestyle and give up drinking. I learned that it wasn't the depression and the loss of music in my life—the alcohol itself had become the problem." Thus S.C.A.T. was born.

Specific Cultural Arts Therapy (S.C.A.T.) is a stress management program based on the contributions of African Americans. It reintroduces the clients to their culture for use as a healing tool to recover from chemical dependency and mental illness. The clients become involved in the process of creating music for and about themselves.

S.C.A.T. utilizes some of the same techniques that many musicians use to calm themselves down. "By the time you finished drinking and doing all those other things that people got involved in, you would sit down and sort of cool out, or chill listening to certain specific songs," Jay says. "In most cases, the songs would be coming out of Coltrane, Miles Davis, Ellington. There were certain Count Basie pieces that had specific tempo, specific chord changes that were therapeutic in that they allowed one to bond and relate to each other nonverbally.

"We often sat on the floor for hours on end in the mornings—from like maybe four to six in the morning—doing absolutely nothing but quietly sitting there listening. It wasn't a period of using anything or drinking—it was just therapeutic. It allowed us to reduce the stresses of disappointment or to come down off the highs." These are the S.C.A.T. concepts.

"I usually take different pieces and I put them on one tape based on tempo, on volume, and on their ability to reduce stress," she says. "It's energetic, yet at the same time, I can talk and I can think. I've found that this music allows people to become highly energetic, yet relaxed."

Mary Lou Williams advised Jay Allbright long ago to listen to the blues and the blues will heal you. "I look at it as a healing force that a person can utilize without having to be verbally guided through the process," says Jay. "It creates a therapeutic atmosphere for healing or reducing levels of stress. I know that it's effective with my own culture. But because I have great belief in a blurb I heard—'if white America has a cold, blacks have pneumonia'—I assume that S.C.A.T. can have a curative effect on anyone."

BACK TO THE MUSIC

Jay wrote to Mary Lou Williams in April of 1980 because she hadn't been playing and feared the music was gone. The two musicians had not been in contact for several years at that point. "About a week after I wrote her, I get this letter back from Duke University where she was teaching. Unfortunately, I had not known that she was ill. I told her that I had not been playing professionally, but that I had started getting that old urge and asked her what she thought."

Did she send Jay off to Iceland again?

"I'm sure she wanted to," Jay chuckles. "Her letter was so inspiring to me. It was just like a letter from God. Basically, she said to begin immediately! She wrote, 'You were great on the piano, and we need your style now because blacks have lost the great art of jazz. Who under forty is playing the music?'" Jay says she rereads this letter whenever she needs to remind herself of the urgency of her music.

"Jazz is so important, so necessary. However, it's important for people to know that I respect their needs in entertainment—either they're attracted to the music or they're not," she says. "I have no control over this music being in my life. In

feet and move their heads when the music plays. People who feel the music deep down inside, who are compelled to move, to dance. For example, when my daughter and I played at the [1992] National Women's Music Festival, a number of people started dancing with each other. These are the people I adore and who I welcome into my life. They feel this music and are called by this music just as I am. I always look for them when I go out on stage."

•••••

Currently, Jay Allbright is performing in jazz and women's music venues with her daughter Punky. With mother on keyboards and daughter on drums, they're now known as the Sugar Hill Duo. [Hear their "Roll 'Em Pete" on the soundsheet in this issue.] Punky traveled on the road with her musician mom until she was old enough to go to school. ("She had some of the most famous babysitters," jokes Jay.) After Punky reached school age, they settled down in New York.

"Our house was like a musical open house, and many drummers were in and out," Jay says. "The drums were always there, and Punky picked up on it. I started doing a lot of private parties in the '80s, and it gave her an excellent opportunity to hone her craft. She knew all of my songs,

Conference, the seventh annual Black Achievers Banquet, and the National Women's Music Festival. Their first solo album is entitled *155th and St. Nicholas*, and they plan to keep on doing what they do best: channel the jazz.

For a catalog of well-researched albums on women jazz and blues greats, including the *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, contact Rosetta Records, 115 W. 16th St. #267, New York, NY 10011. (212) 243-3583. Jay and Punky Allbright (The Sugar Hill Duo) can be reached at 4221 Florida Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45223. (513) 542-8802. •

ABOUT THE WRITERS: Cheryl Miller is a writer, storyteller, and cab driver who makes her home in Chicago. Toni Armstrong Jr. has been involved in the promotion and documentation of women's music and culture for almost twenty years.



The Four Jewels of Jazz in 1954. From left: Gloria Bell, Hettie Mary Smith, R. Jay Allbright, and Willene Barton. Their press kit caption read, "Hopefully facing the future, the Four Jewels feel they can succeed where other all-girl musical groups have failed."

a sense I'm not an entertainer, I'm simply a channel for this music. Most performers of jazz like myself don't expect worldwide acclaim. We play because we must, because the music pulses through us, and because there are people out there who respond to it. People who start to tap their

of course, and had great insight into what I was going to do and how I was going to do it. We work together well, and enjoy it."

The Sugar Hill Duo has appeared in venues as diverse as the University of Cincinnati's Black Arts Festival, Crazy Ladies Bookstore, the Minority Mental Health

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We welcome the business of women

MAINSTREAM *from page 35*

my writing has so far been specifically for *HOT WIRE* and *Outlines* newspaper. I chose to pursue publishing because I like the permanence of publications. I want women 100 years down the road to have something they can hold in their hands—to see pictures of us, read our thoughts, relive our festivals. Most future lesbians won't care about us, I realize, but for the ones who seek their roots...well, I like to think that my work will help them know us, to know that we valued ourselves as women and lesbians even when the world didn't. And that we cared about making a better future for them.

LAURA: I love to be a part of a community so diverse that it boggles my mind, so strong that it brings me hope about the future of the world. I think that my tiny piece of writing contribution has made a difference. Recently I've been writing for more mainstream publications. This means dealing with editors who aren't automatically familiar with the subjects/topics about which I'm writing. But it seems worth it to me to spend my energy educating a straight editor if it means a review of Jamie Anderson/Sue Fink's *A Family of Friends* reaches a lesbian who doesn't read lesbian publications.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF VISIBILITY

SARA: Because of greater visibility, I think more lesbians will choose to consider performing, writing, producing, etc., as options for themselves. It will also mean that creative people have more leeway in terms of building and sustaining their careers. Also, wider experience and opportunities can bring more seasoned and sophisticated sensibilities to the women's scene. Additionally, more and more people will be drawn to events featuring women artists.

SUZANNE: More women will "hear about" Cris, Holly, etc. It will also mean more performers and better talent, and they'll make enough money to live so they can continue to work. Media visibility will result in better production quality on products and events, too. And when people know gay people, they're not as prejudiced. Right now they don't know us—they think we're doing weird stuff like levitating our sex partners, having sex with nine-year-olds, and piercing our labias. The reality is, most of us are just trying to meet someone that we'll like, and we want to build relationships. It's not glamorous and weird, like witchcraft and woo-woo. I get up in front of straight audiences and I talk to them about things that are the same for them as they are for me, like my trouble with dogs. And they go, "*Wow,*

that's just like us. I guess she's not a weird, bizarre, black magic drug-addict..."

TONI JR.: ...using the dog for animal sacrifice...

SUZANNE: ...well, okay, we've all done that.

SANDY: The best part about mainstream visibility is that it's a chance to educate people, depending on how it's done. For the most part, it seems to be positive right now. This is good, because it does away with some of the fears people have, and it shows lesbians as people and not as oddities—not as some cult thing or something weird. We're just going about our lives. For straight people who have some degree of openness, it's filling in the blanks in their ignorance, which is helpful. I think there are always those people out there who *don't* have that openness, and no matter what you present to them, they aren't going to change their opinion. What I've never been able to figure out about our society is what the percentage is. The kind of media that have been doing this—like *20/20* and the major newsmagazines—are probably reaching more people who have an openness than if it had been the *National Enquirer*, for example.

TONI JR.: Though the *Enquirer* has done its share of outing people. For years, they've been desensitizing the public to the L-word by attaching it to various celebrities—most notably Kristy McNichol, Madonna, k.d. lang, and even Marilyn Monroe...

SANDY: ...but I don't think they did it on our behalf. When you're treated like a phenomenon, you're here today and gone tomorrow. They sold their magazines and now they're done; we won't hear from them again for a long time. There won't be consistent coverage connected to who we are and what we do unless it's negative—and they'll still continue with that. By no means have they *normalized* their news coverage of us, or made us a part of the big picture. They're not going to do that because they don't believe it themselves. Otherwise it wouldn't be "the year of the lesbian."

THE DOWN SIDE

SARA: Ironically, it's greater acceptance and visibility and the growth of mainstreaming options that also threatens the very existence of a separate women's music and culture industry. As more mainstream bookstore chains have "women's studies" and "lesbian/gay" sections, the women's bookstore is facing a severe financial threat. As lesbian musicians and comics gain more access to rewarding commercial venues, the less the bigger names will be available to the producers in the women's music/culture scene. Also, audiences will be taken from the small

women producers when big, mainstream names come to town.

SUZANNE: There's the strong possibility that once lesbian culture is on your TV and CD player you won't need to go to festivals, etc. Sadly, this whole genre may die out. But I'd like to think it'll just make it bigger and better! I personally have a big fear, though it hasn't happened yet, that weirdos will think, "...a lesbian comedienne? Well, we'll have to take our Bible Christian group down there and tell her a thing or two." I wait for the day when I start a show and a bunch of them jump up with signs.

TONI JR.: You'll get an Amen from the Hensons down in Mississippi on that one. [See the article on page 28.]

LAURA: Although there may be more money in the mainstream, the price of fiscal enhancement might be having to deal with non-lesbian grantors and having to explain and reexplain our politics, being made to feel defensive and undesirably alternative.

SANDY: One of the things that's already started to disintegrate is women's music producing new acts. I'm sure you can remember the time when there were women producing women's music in every medium-sized city in this country. That isn't true anymore. Women started looking for others to provide for them—not like it used to be, where we provided for ourselves. A lot of young women coming up now are realizing that they have to make it happen for themselves. They're not seeing what they want anywhere, so they're providing it for themselves. They're not even getting hired by women producers—they're playing in small clubs, they're producing themselves, and they're going on whenever they get booked. The club scene is not a delicious scene, but if that's their only venue, that's what they have to do. And they're doing it. I think that's good. But what a shame to have to reinvent everything all over again. Maybe it's necessary because we get apathetic.

TONI JR.: It seems natural. Young people historically prefer to do their own thing. They don't want to hear about how their parents had to walk five miles to school barefoot in the snow. And they don't much care how scary it was for women in the '70s and '80s to perform as lesbians, or to go to events where they might be identified as lesbians. It doesn't seem relevant how we invented and kept festivals and publications going on almost no money. When I was a young activist in the '70s, I didn't much care about what had come before; I was swept away by working with all these cool women to shape the world to *our* vision. That's what the younger women are doing. We gave them a more advanced place to start from, as

our foremothers did for us.

SANDY: In the early years of women's music, there was a vacuum in terms of identity and issues. Pop culture was ignoring everything about women's lives. So then we had these brave souls—not just musicians, but writers and poets and other women involved in their communities—who were talking to each other on an equal basis. It all addressed something that was desperately needed; that's why it was successful. The need for that has been perceived as being "not as necessary," and I think that's a wrong perception. The analogy I always think about whenever I have this discussion is what happened with the "race music" in the '40s. There was a plethora of small black-owned record companies and radio stations. Performers had access to audiences, and they sold a lot of records to people who identified with them and identified with what they were saying.

TONI JR.: Jay Allbright of The Sugar Hill Duo has a lot to say about those years. [See the article on page 40.]

SANDY: Well, one thing that happened was that white music business executives saw money to be made, and all of a sudden they started signing these artists—and they ripped them off in the process, but that's another issue. As a result, those small record companies started folding and the black radio stations started losing their listenership because there was now this music being made available on other radio stations. White music execs could now "deliver" the black audience, so advertising dollars went there, and the black music circuit disintegrated, disappeared. It could happen to us. The whole thing can disappear, just like that. And if we haven't maintained our own institutions, what's left?

SUZANNE: I'm not sure women's culture being mainstreamed will distract lesbians from supporting our institutions. Sometimes we take for granted that all lesbians know about Olivia or *HOT WIRE* or *Lesbian Connection*, and the truth is, they don't know. In fact, barely a percentage know. When Judy Dlugacz and I were on *Geraldo* and they put Olivia's 1-800 number on the air, Olivia took like 5,000 calls that next week from women who had never heard of Olivia, who didn't know there was such a group for lesbians. That's pretty sad. So, personally, I think if I get on television and talk about Cris Williamson, this is great. I think it will only improve things.

TONI JR.: And when we're no longer hot?

SUZANNE: I think that when it's not hot, when they're not making a buck, they'll stop. Who cares? We need the introduction. Lesbians will always have their own culture,

and maybe we'll work harder at it now. I agree that it's taken for granted. But it's a very specific group of women that support lesbian culture now. For example, my lover never heard of Kate, never heard of Cris. She lived in Columbus, Ohio, a perfectly big city, but nothing was ever introduced to her because they advertised in one newspaper that was picked up at the bar. If you weren't the kind of girl who stopped by the bar or the bookstore, you never knew. Now if we can put "Suzanne and Cris and Lucie" in the regular Columbus *Dispatch*, lots of ordinary lesbians will pick up the thing and go, "Lesbian entertainment? I think I'll go down there." We'll be in the mainstream. People will hear about us.



Albert Sanchez

In 1988, k.d. lang (above), Melissa Etheridge, Tracy Chapman, Michelle Shocked, and Phranc burst onto the scene in "Lesbian Chic Wave 1." Androgyny for women performers had suddenly become hip.

THE VALUE OF OUR SUBCULTURE

SARA: Women's music and culture is extremely valuable to me because I don't really trust this mainstreaming trend. I see the mainstream as looking at lesbians with a kind of "liberal" attitude at best—i.e., a "We really should learn to accept these people" kind of attitude. And at worst, it's a freak show, exotica kind of happening. What it *isn't* is a real questioning of society's historical rejection of difference. As in all mainstream venues, complexity must be diluted to appeal to the masses, and anything too radical is seen as unacceptable to commercial appeal. For me, it's still the women's culture scene where I have more of a belief in the basic value system of the audience and

the producers, and where I can bring more of my full self—not only my lesbian, feminist self, but also my politically left, progressive self. That's not to say that there's utter creative freedom in the women's circuit, either.

HARRIET: Actually, I think it raises certain real obstacles to creative freedom that we need to start talking about more openly and reflectively. The festival scene is very much concerned with enforcing "goodness" and creating an environment that is safe and hospitable to all who have felt injured in various ways by our society. But doing so unfortunately often involves a somewhat conservative tendency to replace the trouble of the patriarchal, homophobic world with a very controlled, almost forcibly untroubled environment. This is the mythological land known as "safe space"—the place in which everything that might distress is evacuated. Yet nothing breathes in a vacuum. Bernice Johnson Reagon addressed this issue in a talk at the West Coast Women's Music Festival in 1981, which was later published in an essay called "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." She talks about women's festivals and coalitions and "the myth that there is some common experience that comes just 'cause you're women." Reagon says that coalitions are dangerous places where would-be enemies team up in order to accomplish something important to them. But expecting coalitions to be warm, nurturing havens of like-minded people is preposterous because out in the world, women are different; the place to look for the comfort of people like yourself is home. Reagon worries that too many women try to turn women's festivals—which, if they really are open to all women, should be like coalitions—into a false version of home by attaching "insider" meanings to terms like "women" and "women's music." For example, the word "women" is often used at women's festivals by a particular segment of the lesbian population who comprise an internally recognized subculture. But if the noninitiated show up, believing themselves to be members of the group, everyone is in for a big shock. I think that women's culture needs to provide more opportunities for self-criticism and reflection of the sort that Reagon gave us if it's going to avoid suffocating in its own cocoon of safety; and I think that the music and comedy it produces will only get richer and more vibrant if we allow this to happen.

SARA: Yes. Because while I applaud and agree with the basic values that you find on the women's circuit, the climate can sometimes be one that is unable to tolerate ambiguity—and real art and humor lie in ambiguity. Things that are not wholly "nice" can

continued on the next page

MAINSTREAMING *from 45*

also resonate with truth for people, including lesbians. Diversity work must continue, and the willingness to tolerate complexity and even discomfort in our thinking must happen as well. There's still a feeling of anxiety I have in performing at certain events because certain jokes may offend. For example, I do a joke about women's festivals which goes: "Where else can you hear, booming through the trees: 'Will Running River Schwartz please meet her lover Oat Bran at the light bondage tent immediately?'" When I'm *not* at a women's festival, I tell the joke and it's received very well. However, at some of the festivals, I'll change the "light bondage" reference to "The Womb" [a Michigan Festival health care area]. I've learned that the subject of S/M is too sensitive and controversial for some women to handle. This is an example of the kind of self-censorship that the women's circuit can inspire. I'd like to see more honest and open-ended discussion of that problem—an ongoing discussion of what's "good" or "bad."

TONI JR.: The world is so often a cruel and hurtful place for women, based on their race, size, age, level of physical ability, class, looks, or gender. There've been sincere attempts to create experiences where the hurtful aspects of the status quo are checked at the door. I agree that in some cases this has been a bit rigid, but there's value in having these "emotionally safer" zones. It gives the participants new ways to look at the world when they go home. That's one of the valuable aspects of having our own festivals, our own coffeehouses, whatever. I think you should just tell the joke as is in all venues.

LAURA: The art that we all help to create is wonderful, provocative, and familiar. It's valuable to me to continue to put energy into women's music and culture because positive self-identity can be achieved through separation from an oppressive context. I/we sometimes need a place to be with other lesbians, without men, with few straight women, immersed in lesbian culture.

SUZANNE: There are *many* valuable aspects to having women's culture, and we should keep it alive. It made my whole life easier. I came out to lesbian concerts, reading *Lesbian Connection* and *HOT WIRE*, and all the periodicals in between. There is no way to measure the effect on me—I probably would have become a straight comic living a lie, or—worse—done nothing.

LAURA: On a personal note, I've made so many friends, and done some useful connecting through the women's culture network, getting to know lesbians whom I might not have encountered through other channels in my life.

TONI JR.: Me, too. I have the most creative, fascinating friends and business associates anyone could hope for.

LAURA: If there were no women's culture, the self-identification process might not happen as readily. Even the younger generations of dykes—who seem to be able to come out and find friends/partners without specific festival attendance, for example—owe a debt to the existence of those festivals. What's brought home from the festivals is a tolerance and empathy which nurtures individuation.

TONI JR.: I believe the need for the feminist entertainment subculture is as strong as ever, for many reasons. Serious women instrumental musicians still experience extreme forms of discrimination, though we are seeing a few more players in bands these days. Some mainstream albums have woman-identified lyrics—"Louise's Church" on the new Laura Nyro album, for example—but when you read the credits, it's almost all guys as musicians, producers, and engineers. I'm not criticizing Laura; I'm a big fan of hers. I just mean her album is a typical mainstream album; we need to be realistic about the fact that the mainstream music industry is still mostly not welcoming women except as singers.

SUZANNE: And mainstream lesbian chic will probably only be a fad for awhile, anyway. As a different president comes in, for example, we may not be able to even get an ad in a local paper. I don't think when Reagan and Bush were in office we could have gotten as much; it really got rolling when they were out of power. It's like the new generation with the Clintons in office, and you have to be aware of the political climate. There may be another time—who knows, ten years down the road—when it's horrible again. We have to take care of what we have.

TONI JR.: Another difference between mainstream and women's culture that I rarely hear analyzed is what it's like to be in mainstream vs. women's culture audiences. This is not a minor, insignificant detail. I see literally hundreds of acts per year—mostly in women's venues, but I also go to small clubs and big-ticket productions. Well, I went to see Paula Poundstone at a mainstream hall near where I work last year. There were obviously many lesbians in the crowd, and one woman even brought a large bouquet up to the stage. ("Why, thank you, Ma'am...is that a Pop Tart in there?" quipped Paula as she peered into the flowers.) What a different atmosphere from the Michigan Comedy Stage! I found myself feeling closeted and nervous about being affectionate with my girlfriend—a feeling I'm absolutely unaccustomed to having

when I see entertainers in women's music venues. No matter who's on the stage, lesbians *in the audiences* will probably not feel totally at ease for many years to come. There's no guarantee that every straight person with you in that mainstream audience is open-minded. There could be nasty repercussions in your everyday life if you're seen "being yourself" at a show and then subsequently outed at work or to your family. Women's venues provide a safe environment in which to be our lesbian selves without pretense or anxiety, and we can't overestimate the value of that.

In the next issue, we'll continue talking about what it would be like if there was no women's culture; what obstacles are still in the way of the mainstream entertainment industry accepting genuine feminist-based and/or lesbian-oriented performers, events, and films; what needs to happen to continue making the mainstream entertainment media inclusive of feminist and lesbian performers, products, and events; and predictions for the year 2000. •

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS: **TONI ARMSTRONG JR.** has been involved in women's music and culture since the mid-'70s as a publisher, editor, writer, photographer, bass player, and provider of housing to musicians on tour. **SARA CYTRON** has performed out lesbian stand-up comedy for dozens of clubs, festivals, Pride events, colleges, and organizations. She has been featured in 'The Village Voice,' 'New Directions for Women,' 'The Advocate,' and was even quoted in 'Glamour.' **HARRIET MALINOWITZ** is an assistant professor of English at Long Island University in Brooklyn and is a comedy writer for Sara Cytron. She has just completed a book about lesbian and gay college writers which will be published by Heinemann in late 1994. **LAURA POST** is a psychiatrist as well as a writer. Watch for her syndicated "Muse News" column about women's culture. Her writings have appeared in more than 100 publications. She's finding time lately to sing and play her guitar again. **SANDY RAMSEY**, long-time women's music expert, has worked for Olivia Records, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and the Institute for the Musical Arts (IMA). She is a consultant in the women's music circuit on small businesses, marketing, financial planning, and fundraising. **SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER** has been performing out lesbian comedy in mainstream clubs since 1990, and has made numerous television appearances as an out lesbian. She has performed at most of the women's festivals and plays to packed houses whenever she tours in the women's circuit.

MISS BESSIE from page 13

was a successful woman who had been earning \$2,000 a week for years. She had many of the things she wanted: cars, real estate, expensive clothes, a white ermine fur, a dark brown mink, jewelry, and plenty of people around to do her bidding.

She bought her own eighty-foot Pullman railroad car in 1925 to make traveling easier and to spare herself and her troupe the indignities they had to suffer because of the lack of hotels that would accommodate blacks. (Segregation existed in the North as well as the South.) She wanted a child, so she adopted one in 1926 and kept a housekeeper to attend to him. Bessie supported a huge number of relatives in a style to which they easily became accustomed. She set up her sister Viola in the restaurant business in Philadelphia and bought her a house.

Many blues singers found it hard to get work because of the Great Depression and the advent of talking pictures and radio, which caused the demise of the T.O.B.A. circuit. But Bessie Smith continued to work until the day she died (September 26, 1937, in Clarksdale, Mississippi).

Miss Bessie always fulfilled her fans' expectations. All the rowdiness in the theater stopped when she walked on stage. What a splendid figure of a woman she was, with an assured presence and statuesque carriage—at 5'9" with 200 pounds of firm flesh, she had dark chocolate skin with the shine of Godiva's best, animated black eyes, and a smile that warmed you or a scowl that scared you. She ruled the stage. Microphones didn't exist in the early years, and by using a vocal cord technique called "throwing it from the velvet," Bessie could be heard in the last seat of any sized theater or tent—even across the street. People in small towns across the South couldn't wait to get her new releases through mail order, and went down to the railroad station to pay porters as much as \$5 for a 75¢ record.

During the ten years Miss Bessie recorded, starting in 1923 with "Downhearted Blues" to "Do Your Duty" in 1933, she gave us a body of work that is a landmark of twentieth-century music. Her legacy includes 160 recorded songs.

In 1929, Bessie starred in the only movie she ever made, a seventeen-minute two-reeler filmed in Astoria, New York. Despite being full of clichés and racist and sexist stereotypes, it is the only example we have of her on film. It also is the closest we can come to seeing her "live" and hearing her sing the title song, "St. Louis

Blues," to the marvelous music of James P. Johnson at the piano with the Fletcher Henderson band and the Hall Johnson Choir as backup. Rather than being cast as the Empress she was, she was cast as an unlucky prostitute whose pimp preferred a light-skinned woman. The cabaret setting, however, was authentic—not hoked up as it would have been by Hollywood.

Bessie and Jack Gee separated that same year, and in 1930 she made a permanent association with Richard Morgan (Lionel Hampton's uncle), who left his bootlegging work in Chicago to become her manager. They had known and liked each other for many years.

GONE TOO SOON

During the Great Depression, even the Empress of the Blues felt the slump. The T.O.B.A. had closed down, record companies were hardly recording, and the theaters that remained open were paying modest salaries. Nonetheless, Bessie continued to work, even if the pace was slower. Although the blues was out of date in New York, it was still popular in the South, so she traveled more there and accepted less money. Her style changed with the times: she abandoned the 1920s look for the simpler, more elegant bias-cut gown style of the 1930s, and she was singing more of the popular songs of the day with the new sound of swing as backing.

In New York she worked at The Harlem Opera House, The Apollo, and Connie's Inn in midtown, then did a long stint as the star of a nightclub show in Philadelphia. Recording prospects were in the offing, and in the fall of 1937 she worked in a traveling show in the South called *Broadway Rastus*.

In the early morning hours of September 26, 1937, Miss Bessie was on her way from Memphis to Darling, Mississippi. Traveling on Route 61, with Richard Morgan at the wheel of the Packard, she was fatally wounded in a car accident. The official death certificate states that she died in the black hospital in Clarksdale on at 11:30 a.m. Her death was attributed to shock, loss of blood, and internal injuries.

A month later, a writer named John Hammond published an article based on hearsay in *Downbeat* magazine, stating that Bessie Smith's death was the result of her bleeding to death in the foyer of a white hospital in Memphis that refused to treat her. This untrue story was compounded by Edward Albee in a play he wrote called *The Death of Bessie Smith*, produced in New York in 1961.

The Empress of the Blues was buried in an unmarked grave in Mount Lawn Cemetery in Philadelphia. Thirty-three years later, in August 1970, a gravestone was erected and dedicated. It was paid for by Juanita Green (president of the Philadelphia NAACP, who as a child had washed Bessie's floors) and white blues singer Janis Joplin (who was then at the height of her own career). The two women were joined by officials from Columbia Records.

There have been many Queens of the Blues, but Bessie Smith was the only Empress and remains, as always, unchallenged. In 1984, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, along with Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, the crusading labor organizer. Miss Bessie took her place alongside other outstanding American women who created a significant change in American culture: Emily Dickinson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Keller, and thirty other previous honorees.

Since 1980, a campaign has been underway to have the image of Bessie Smith published on a United States postage stamp in the Performing Arts series to commemorate her contribution to American music. Those wishing to participate in this effort can petition the Postmaster General, U.S. Postal Service, Washington, DC 20260. Emphasize that Bessie Smith was the first woman to create an American art form from a musical folk expression. Her blues/jazz legacy is the bedrock of America's greatest contribution to world culture. With 1994 as the centennial of her birth, it would be the most fitting time to celebrate this great American artist. •

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to Toni Armstrong Sr.

ON STAGE AND OFF

DANCING WITH SUSAN

By Susan Herrick as told to Laura Post

Susan Herrick began putting passionate words and melodies to music at age twelve, and as a teenager she played early women's music classics with a women's band in mainstream settings. Her burgeoning political consciousness led her to personal awareness work and to an acoustic debut solo record ('Loving Me,' 1986).

On the heels of those public endeavors came multiple private challenges, including the recalling of sexual abuse from childhood and the breakup of a seven-year relationship. Fortified by self-healing, Susan released her second album ('Truth and the Lie,' 1991) on the Watch-fire label, which she co-founded with her then-new partner Jessie Cocks. In 1992, Susan began teaming with Jessie as a co-leader of hands-on, grassroots workshops aimed at helping women find their voices.

Susan's popularity in the women's music scene continued to grow. Her name appeared in the 1993 'HOT WIRE Readers' Choice Survey' in several categories, including Favorite New Performer and Favorite Song ("You Deserve"). After seeing Susan perform at the Ohio Lesbian Festival in September 1993, a Cincinnati woman wrote an eight-page poetic tribute to Susan's essential amazonianism, serious artistry, and beautiful power—an ambitious, but not atypical, response to Susan's intuitive energy.

Susan talks about the changes that have led to her latest recording, 'Soul Chant.'

A vibrant woman in a wheelchair approached me after one of my concerts. She had multiple sclerosis, and although she couldn't walk at that point, she was undergoing drug treatment that she hoped would restore mobility to her legs. "I hadn't been able to imagine walking until you sang and moved out the words 'walk me down from the mountain' ['Shame Mountain' from *Soul Chant*]," she told me. "As you did this, I could imagine myself walking, feel myself walking, again."

ON STAGE AND OFF addresses issues of interest to and about musicians and performers.



Susan Herrick: "It's a story of moving from the dance of the wounded to the dance of the empowered, from the song of brokenness to the song of wholeness."

I love that story—it's such a beautiful illustration of how reconnecting to my body translates to the audience members' reconnection with their own.

There's been a shift in my performance, in my music, and in my vocal presentation in the last couple of years. I guess there's been a significant growth spurt for me. It's a story of moving from the dance of the wounded to the dance of the empowered, from the song of brokenness to the song of wholeness. It's a story of how I'm returning to my body, and how that manifests in my art, my life, and on stage.

Many people identify one of the strongest aspects of *Truth and the Lie* as my speaking the truth about being a survivor of sexual abuse. That was a very strong move for me to make in my life. [See May 1991 issue of *HOT WIRE*.] For a long time, my performances had a lot of intensity in terms of sharing that angst. It was—and still is—important for me to be very

authentic and sometimes vulnerable with my audience.

Over time, though, what I found was missing in my performance, in my art, and in my life, was having the other parts in balance. I was talking with people, including *HOT WIRE* editor Toni Armstrong Jr., and asking them—as mentors—how to improve my performance. One suggestion that came out of this was, essentially, "Honey, shake your groove thing." People really encouraged me to develop and express a kind of sensuality and vibrancy that would balance the depth that I went to in expressing my struggle.

LEARNING TO SHAKE MY GROOVE THING

I began my search for a teacher. A choreographer? Or perhaps a movement therapist? I figured I could go either from the outside in or the inside out, and I ultimately decided to work from the inside out.

I found Dr. Alice Rutkowski in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, a psychotherapist, movement therapist, and protégé of Anna Halprin, the renowned modern dance pioneer. I'd heard about Alice in the past—that she was doing work (called Motional Processing) using movement, sound, drawing, and other creative arts—and I had an intuitive flash that someday I'd be an apprentice to her. A year later, when I was looking for help in learning to move more fluidly, someone mentioned her.

I started to work with her. My goals were to become more *present* in my performance, move more, and open my voice more fully. For me, that was the beginning of moving beyond the act of telling my truth as a survivor. I believe it's important that we acknowledge the woundings, and confront them, and heal them; but there's this whole other place I needed to develop—like the aspects of me that got frozen when the woundings took place.

The first time I worked with Alice, I

had to do a drawing, a "kinetic visualization," of a part of my body. I drew my legs as these little spindly thin sticks. It was clear that Susan Herrick was not very grounded, didn't have much of a leg to stand on! This was clear in my performance, too—I wanted to sit on a stool, and my body would get very, very tired if I stood up for too long. If I would try to move or groove, I'd often lose my balance.

At another point, I did a drawing about performing. It showed me turning away, hiding my face. It was clear that I couldn't be present to the kind of attention that was being paid to me when I was on stage. A part of me was going away. Another drawing I did was titled "Volume Pig," and it showed a two- or three-year-old whose mouth was almost as big as half the page, just screaming. I realized that I had this memory of being shamed for being too loud as a child. There were ways I sang inwardly to compensate, because I was afraid to sing in my full voice. I'd be in my voice lessons saying, "Oh, I can't sing like that because I'm being a Volume Pig!"

So there I was, thirty years old, at the edge of beginning a process to move back into my body after a lifetime of having left it—moving more into my full voice, being more present on stage; allowing for connection with self and audience.

I had tried intellectual and behavioral approaches and, to some degree, they were effective. But I realized that for me to cross over this, I was going to have to go to the core. To the source. To the heart of the matter.

Alice and I began working with some of these drawings. We'd talk about it, and then I would move my body into the position of the drawing. For several sessions we explored the drawing of pulling away and how that related to my past, my family, my present, and my relationships. What we were beginning to identify was that there were aspects of me—spiritually, physically, and emotionally—that were very contracted. Contracted in ways that may have served me once, but now kept me from my full expression.

I explored moving in a contracted position, and that was very safe, familiar, and comfortable. Then we began to look at what it would be like to be in an expanded position, to really open my body. It included guided imagery, visualizations, drawings, and—not at all unusual in this process—I wrote a song about the free and expressive child I once was.

Still, the idea of opening was scary

for me. Eventually we set up an enactment. On one side of the large room, I hung a drawing of me being contracted. On the other side of the room we hung a drawing that was of me being open and expansive. The instructions were to move from one place to the other in the positions that we'd explored. I could very easily move in the contracted place—I spent a lot of time there. But as soon as I tried to get into the expanded place, I couldn't do it. I couldn't step over.

"What do you see?" Alice asked. "I see this gray abyss," I said. "I'm terrified."

We sat there for awhile and talked about it. Alice had me imagine what it might be like to go over to the other side. For the longest time, I couldn't. Then suddenly I began to see, in my mind's eye, this rolling mist on the expanded side. It was calling to me.

I stepped over and began to move as if I were the mist, windmilling my arms, with my chest expanded, and making sounds like the wind. I realized that, very possibly for the first time in my life, I moved in a fresh way regarding this issue. Something had shifted, awakened in my body. In some way, I would move this way in my life.

That was January 1993. Now, if you can imagine that kind of process a hundred fold, then you know what this past year and a half has been like for me.

A couple of weeks later I had a performance, and I get teary just thinking



Toni Armstrong Jr.

about it. It was in Virginia, and I remember being up on stage. At some point, I was singing a song and I noticed I was starting to worry—"I wonder what they're thinking," and on and on. That was me beginning to go away into that contracted place. Then, suddenly, in my mind's eye, I saw the mist and immediately imagined dancing in the audience like I had in Alice's studio. I felt a connection with the

audience that I'd never felt before. I felt like I was at play with them, that there was no distance between us. I knew my performances would never be the same.

What I've found over the course of the past year and a half as I have explored different areas of my body is how I've not been present in them, how they've been asleep or frozen. I find places that are holding some memory, or some way of moving that doesn't serve me anymore. And, most importantly, I've begun to identify what potentials of range, movement, and awakening are available there.

As I come more and more into my body, what I experience on stage is that I'm more connected to my earth element. My legs are there, and I'm grounded. I'm also more connected to my air element as I move in that mist. I'm more connected to my fire—I'm actually dancing around—and to my water, as I move from the depths of a place that's authentic.

VOLUME PIG NO MORE

I did a nine-day group intensive with Alice called "Rediscovery of the Self." I did more of the work that I've been talking about. I found the place where I could be as big and intense and as creative as I longed to be. I found a place where I could do that and not be a Volume Pig—like there was space for everyone to be that big. In those nine days I returned to my original spirit size. It was right after that, actually, that I wrote "Soul Chant." What I've come to realize is that whether I have a stage with 2,000 people listening or not, I will always have my huge spirit, and my intensity will always seek a space that's big enough to express it in.

Having Alice as a mentor brought up another core issue which had shut me down in the past. I had been sexually abused by the two women—lesbians—who were my first musical mentors. Thus, I had come to confuse sex, wanting, music, creativity, and mentoring.

continued on page 51

ABOUT THE WRITER: *Laura Post's writings, reviews, and syndicated columns ("Muse News: Report on Women's Arts, Entertainment, and Culture" and "Ask Judith and Laura" have been printed in 'Ms.,' 'Washington Blade,' 'off our backs,' 'Sojourner,' 'DENEUVE,' 'HOT WIRE,' 'Sing Out!' and more than ninety other alternative newspapers and magazines.*

KATHY NAJIMY from page 5

IF YOU COULD WRITE THE PLOT FOR *SISTER ACT 3*...?

Well, there won't be a *Sister Act 3*, but as I kiddingly suggested in *Out* magazine, maybe Sister Mary Patrick could have an affair with the young nun. It entertains me to think of them going off together and spinning off a new TV sitcom about two lesbian nuns. Wouldn't that be great fun?

YOU'VE BEEN VOCAL ABOUT YOUR OPINIONS ON THE AMERICAN BEAUTY STANDARD. YOU'VE SAID YOUR PARENTS BROUGHT YOU UP PRAISING HOW SMART, CREATIVE, AND PRETTY YOU WERE. YOU SEEM TO BE SOMEBODY WHO HAS VERY LITTLE ANGST ABOUT THE WAY YOU LOOK.

Well, it depends what day you catch me on. On a sane day, my reaction is to say everyone looks different, we have to appreciate the way everyone looks, and we must reject the pressure there is for women to all look like Barbie dolls. I'm glad that stereotypes are being broken.

But I can't say that there isn't a day that I'm not subtly affected, especially in this town [L.A.]. This is the *worst* place for anybody who's not a supermodel to be. You can't help but think that life would be prettier, happier, more joyous, more light and fabulous if you looked like Heather Locklear, you know? Truthfully, I think if somebody came down and said, "You have a choice to look the way you look or the way Heather looks," I'd keep the way I look. But my point is that no matter how comfortable we get with the notion of being ourselves, it's like being in the middle of a war and trying to ignore the bombs. You can play music, you can talk really loud, you can close your doors, and you might be able to live happily in your little house—most days. That doesn't mean that the bombs aren't going off, or that you don't hear them once in awhile. I feel proud of myself because a couple of years ago I realized that I was resenting the emotion and angst related to weight and looks...you know when it really hit me? When my friends started dying of AIDS. Then I thought, "You have the blessing of *life*. You should try not to spend one more moment wishing that you were something else, because you get to live." I made a vow that I was just going to try to be healthier. I swim about five times a week and try to eat right, but I decided that I wasn't going to go on another diet again, because it doesn't work for me.

That's on a sane day. But there are other days when I might opt for the Heather Locklear look.

IN HOLLYWOOD, I BET YOU'RE IN THE MINORITY WITH YOUR VIEWPOINTS.

I went to L.A. and started meeting these powerful women in the industry. I thought we'd have great talks—great in-depth talks. But I found myself with them, talking about the ham sandwich they shouldn't have eaten at lunch, or their cellulite. Or the pants that were getting too tight. I resent it—think of how it pushes women's energy down. Think of what we could do, what kinds of power we could have if we released that self-conscious feeling and that obsession.

MARGE PIERCY SAYS, "IF YOU SPENT THE AMOUNT OF TIME EACH WEEK YOU SPENT IN PURSUIT OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S BODY ON LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, WRITING SOMETHING MEANINGFUL, PRACTICING PIANO, OR CHANGING THE SOCIETY—THIS COUNTRY WOULD BE A FAR DIFFERENT PLACE."

Absolutely. We could change the world. Great, powerful, successful, rich, accomplished women, and all they care about is their thighs. I'm not trying to make sweeping generalities—I'm sure there are tons of women who dedicate their lives to richer things—but I was astonished at the many women I would go in for a meeting with and end up talking about how much fat there is in yogurt. It's *depressing*. Taking the "we're-okay-as-is" position is hard for me, because I don't want to sound like I can be overweight and be totally fine with it and never even think of it. Of course I think of it, of course things hit me in the face every day that remind me that I'm different from how people think I should be. But do I obsess over it in a way that makes my life stop? No. And do I try to be productive and live a good life without being obsessed with it? Yes. And I feel I'm pretty successful at it.

PLUS WE HAVE SEVERAL GREAT WOMEN NOW WHO ARE DIFFERENT, AND NOT ONLY IN WEIGHT. WHOOP! GOLDBERG, FOR INSTANCE, DOESN'T FIT THE PRECONCEIVED MALE IDEA OF WHAT BEAUTY IS.

I think she's really beautiful, and she's managed to change what we all think is beautiful. Delta Burke, Roseanne Arnold, Lily Tomlin, Bette Midler, Katharine Hepburn, Linda Ellerbee—all these women, who actually look like real women, represent the masses more than the women on *Dynasty*. Barbra Streisand—another perfect example. She played romantic leads from way back. I was watching *What's Up, Doc?* and *The Way We Were* the other night, thinking, "Wow, she really broke some barriers. She's playing

beautiful, sexy, leading romantic women. As she should."

IT WAS A SIGNIFICANT MESSAGE WHEN STREISAND REFUSED TO GET A NOSE JOB EARLY IN HER CAREER. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE GET THE MESSAGE FROM CELEBRITIES THAT WOMEN'S BODIES ARE FINE IN THEIR NATURAL STATE. IT REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE WHAT PEOPLE IN THE PUBLIC EYE CHOOSE TO DO, DOESN'T IT?

It does. Now, I'm not against cosmetic surgery at all—I think people need to do whatever it is they need to do to make their lives happy and comfortable, as long as it doesn't hurt someone else...

...BECAUSE YOU'RE FOR CHOICE. LIBERATION IS SUPPOSED TO MEAN MORE CHOICES, NOT LESS. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE RECENT LESBIAN CHIC TREND?

Wait, let me ask my lover—Sandra, what do you think about this lesbian chic thing? Seriously, I think lesbian chic is cool. If it's going to be chic to be anything, then lesbianism is right up there. I mean, at least it's not chic to be a white racist, or a redneck closed-minded bigot. I think we should ride with it!

WILL IT MAKE ANY PERMANENT CHANGES IN THE WAY SOCIETY CONCEPTUALIZES LESBIANS?

I think so. I guess there are two schools of thought. One is that people are basically homophobic by nature, and have to be taught differently. But then there are also those who say lesbianism was always accepted because it's a male fantasy. I don't know which one of those is operating...I don't know if society just became more open, or if the fantasy blew up.

BUT THE WOMEN WHO ARE BEING OUTED, AND ARE OUTING THEMSELVES, AREN'T THE TYPES WHO PARTICULARLY PLAY INTO THAT MALE FANTASY IDEAL.

Melissa Etheridge certainly could be that.

SHE DOESN'T PUT OUT THAT KIND OF SOFTCORE PORN ENERGY THAT ATTRACTS MEN, THOUGH.

No, of course not, but I mean if people just saw a picture of her, without hearing her speak or knowing what's on her mind. It's cool that famous women are coming out, whatever their reasons. I've been saying this should happen for years and years. I think a way to help cure AIDS is for famous people to come out and say they're gay. A lot of the

lack of AIDS research is because of homophobia, and once people start realizing that the people they admire are gay, homophobia will slowly be chipped away. I realize, though, that it's not easy for gay people to come out. Maybe it would be good if someone organized a Gay Day, where all celebrities came out at once, so they wouldn't be just individually pinpointed in the media for their story.

THAT WOULD BE GREAT.

Wouldn't it? I mean, I'm in love with my boyfriend [musician John Boswell]—I've been with him for eight years, and I would love it if we stayed together for the rest of our lives. But I feel like I'm bisexual in nature. I know this may really get me in trouble, but I feel like everybody is bisexual. I feel like there are events and circumstances that push us one way or another. I certainly understand the need for people to have a firm base in their sexuality, especially if they're homosexual, because there's so much threatening the basic right to make that choice...

...BUT IN A PERFECT WORLD, WITHOUT OPPRESSION TO PUSH PEOPLE TO CHOOSE ONE DIRECTION OR THE OTHER...

...yeah, like if we were all born with the same parents, and no church and state. I feel like as a person, I celebrate the ability that I have to fall in love with a human being. People often ask, "If you're not gay, how come you do so much for gay and lesbian rights?" Well, I'm a feminist, so I work for abortion rights, I work for AIDS, I work for gay and lesbian rights, I work for anti-racism—all of those things. But I also hold

fast to my right, and everyone's right, to fall in love with whomever they want. It just so happens that I fell in love with John Boswell, but it could just as easily have been Jane Boswell. There are things about John being a man that attracted me to him, and I'm sure a lot of that is because of my socialization and my conditioning. I don't try to deny his maleness as being part of what's attractive to me. His complete package as a human makes him attractive, and makes me want to be with him exclusively. But I do believe that I'm bisexual—that everybody is. People have the scope of emotion to fall in love with anyone, regardless of gender.

AS THE YEARS PROGRESS, DO YOU THINK PEOPLE WILL FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THESE ISSUES?

Oh, just look at this year. AIDS has brought a lot of people out of the closet. AIDS has taken many apathetic gay people and made them political activists—because it's life and death. I think more than half the gay activists are political now because of AIDS. Look at ACT UP and Queer Nation—those sprouted out of desperation, and I applaud them.

SPEAKING OF DESPERATION...I'M DESPERATE FOR A SEQUEL TO THE KATHY AND MO SHOW.

It was a two-hour play, you know. We did an hour of it on HBO, so there's another hour that hasn't been seen. We're talking to Showtime about it now.

IS KATHY AND MO RENTABLE?

No, but if this deal works out, maybe Showtime can buy the first hour and we can

release both hours on video. That's what I'm hoping. Mo and I have also written a screenplay called *Bus Plunge* that we're rewriting this year, and hopefully someday that will be made. [It will star Kathy Najimy and Mo Gaffney in the story of the reunion of survivors of a near-disaster.]

ANY MOVIES IN THE WORKS?

Out of the last forty scripts I've read, there were only two I became incredibly passionate about. They're both real long shots, so I'm working very hard to try to make them happen. I'm going to be doing the American version of *Antonia and Jane*, an English film by Biban Kidron that's being rewritten by Wendy Wasserstein. Also, I'm in contact with some one- and two-woman shows that they want me to direct. I have a whole different feeling about what I want to do this year. Last year was about big, broad comedies that were very commercial. This year is about something different.

Well, it's been great talking with you, Toni, but I'm visiting my mom and she has Lebanese food on the table—and frankly, tabouli wins out over the cause any time.

'The Kathy and Mo Show' script is available through the Dramatist Play Service in New York, (212) 683-8960. •

ABOUT THE WRITER: Toni Armstrong Jr. has been the publisher/managing editor of 'HOT WIRE: The Journal of Women's Music and Culture' since 1984. She is also a photographer specializing in live concert photography, and her extensive vampire collection of books and comics now includes more than 200 items. Toni occasionally plays bass with Alix Dobkin and Kay Gardner in their band Lavender Jane.

HERRICK from page 49

This confusion had manifest itself in harmful and repetitious patterns in my life.

Alice walked me through that. It was the hardest, most challenging work I've ever done. But the choice was, quite literally, to go to an early grave or to move through. We did "scores" (enactments/explorations) that ranged from "The Black Hole and The Gun," "Interception," "Wanting," and "Holding" to "I Will Not Have

Sex With You," "Suicide," "The Crossing," and "The Gold."

I wanted to protect the glory of my first creative blossoming; I wished to protect my destructive yet habitual pattern of attaining "love"; and I thought I should protect sister-lesbians. But I finally realized I couldn't reclaim my voice until I owned the truth. Alice provided the safest place I've ever known to move through that process, and I am eternally grateful.

When the Ohio Lesbian Festival

came along and the dear woman in the audience gifted me with her poem, my reclamation was clearly translating into the audience's experience of me and themselves. That poem was about what she recognized in herself as well as what she saw in me.

That's why I do this work. I want us all to have an opportunity to fully express ourselves, to experience our wholeness, and for each of us to come to know our body as the safe place we call home. •

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RE:INKING

LEZ-BE-OPINIONATED

By Marilyn Murphy



I always wanted to be a writer, but the circumstances of my life—poverty, early marriage, and children—thwarted my ambition.

In 1965, I divorced my husband and went to college. There, my writing skills were praised by my professors and by the students who typed my papers in exchange for me writing theirs. When the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement exploded around us, I was ready to make my opinions known, in person (as a member of the speaker's bureau for the Orange County Women's Liberation Movement Center) and in print. I sent articles and letters to the editors of feminist and Lesbian publications, and many of them were published.

Over the years, I achieved a certain notoriety for my spoken and written opinions—opinions I considered to be logical, reasonable Lesbian feminism. In 1982, Jinx Beers, founder and publisher of the Los Angeles-based *Lesbian News*,

suggested I write a monthly opinion column for the paper. I was thrilled and said yes quickly, before she changed her mind. I have written for the *LN* ever since. I've also written for *New Directions For Women*, *Ms.*, and many other Lesbian and feminist newspapers, magazines, and journals. The title of my column "Lesbianic Logic" came from the unique imagination of Diane Germain, cartoonist and founder of Intellectuals Anonymous.

If it hadn't been for Jinx's offer, I would have remained an amateur writer. A deadline, and the fear that Jinx might cancel the column if I missed a month, kept my laziness in check. To tell the truth, I'd much rather read than write. I'd much rather talk my ideas than write, as well. In fact, I usually hate to write, in part because I never learned to type.

I do, however, love to "have written," love seeing my name in print. What an ego trip writing is! Once the column appears in the paper, I usually feel completely separate from it, as if its creation happened by magic. I forget the misery I suffered while writing and editing the piece, over and over and over again. It is a weird experience. I can read one of my

pieces, say, "This is good, really good," and not feel like I'm showing off. However, when I am unhappy about the way a piece turned out, I feel covered with shame each time I see it.

EVERYBODY HAS AN OPINION

Being an opinion columnist is an interesting adventure. Usually, I won't know when someone is mad at me for something I wrote in last month's column or in one I wrote last year or even ten years ago. As a result, I've had some unexpected and unpleasant encounters at parties and meetings.

I'll see a Lesbian I know, or one I don't know, and I'll smile and make eye contact. I've been doing that all my life, and I almost always get a smile back. Since I've been writing my column, the recipient of my smiling attention sometimes returns eye contact with a squint, a scowl, a cold shoulder, or an angry retort.

Once at a small dinner party, I was with a woman—a stranger to me—whose homophobic son had stormed out of her life when he turned eighteen, never to be heard from again. She was heartbroken and guilt-ridden about the situation. A column I had written describing the reasoning which led me to absent myself from my own son's wedding had enraged her. When she realized who I was, she was after me, trying to get me to admit I was a "bad" mother, turning every subject of conversation into a dig or a lecture on mother/son relations. (What a terrible evening that was.)

I've had my share of nasty letters, too—letters condemning my opinions and vilifying my character, letters published in the papers for all to read. I've been described as bitter and sick, as a traitor to the women's movement, as "worse than the Ku Klux Klan." Most of my hate mail comes from Lesbians and married women who are defending men, trying (in my opinion) to prove to themselves and others that they are not man-haters. They become enraged at the mention of our need for

RE:INKING articles deal with women's publishing and writing, including individual women, book projects, and related issues.

woman-only, girl-only space. When I suggest that living and/or having sex with men might not be physically, emotionally, and politically healthy for women, married feminists, women who used to be Lesbians and now identify themselves as bisexuals, and liberal Lesbians can get pretty abusive. There have been letters from Lesbians who choose to wear cosmetics, dresses, and high-heeled shoes and insist they are not passing as heterosexuals. Some of those have been harsh too, though they are not as condemning as the letters I get from Lesbians who disagree with my belief that Lesbian sadomasochism and Lesbian sex are two different behaviors.

I seldom get letters of praise from readers of "Lesbianic Logic," and when I do, they are usually sent to me personally rather than to the letters section of the paper. I am puzzled by this difference in letter writers. Once, I got a letter, sent to my house, from a Lesbian who wrote dreadful letters to the *Lesbian News* about me all the time. (She sent a sealed, stamped envelope for Jinx to address and send on to me.) She wrote, "I loved your column 'Looking For Lesbians,' thought it was one of the funniest things I ever read." Why didn't she send *that* to the paper for everyone to read?

Another letter writer said, "After reading your column, 'Homophobia and Death in the Closet,' I came out to my mother. She was fine about it. Thank you." I wished I'd read her letter in the pages of the *LN* instead of in the privacy of my kitchen. I'm told that people who agree with a columnist seldom write letters to the editor. Still, for years, I worried that the only Lesbians who liked what I wrote were my companion lover Irene, Diane Germain, a few Lesbian writers I'd heard from, a stranger or two, and two of my three Lesbian sisters.

Then, in June 1991, Clothespin Fever Press published a collection of the best *Lesbian News* columns from my first eight years, entitled *Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures in Lesbianic Logic*. (The title is taken from one of my columns about the adventures Irene and I enjoyed while RVing Lesbian-style.) We attended the American Booksellers Association's national convention in New York City to witness the book's debut. I was breathless with excitement. I signed my book for almost two hundred people—be still my heart!

So far, every woman who mentions my book says she loves it! I am ecstatic about this change in "feedback." Giving readings and signing books in fifty-some

bookstores and coffeehouses around the country has been a most gratifying experience. In the three years since the book's been out, I have received no nasty letters, not a one. Isn't that odd? I'm still not used to the absence of character assassination and vilification. Readers say my love for Lesbians comes through in the book. It warms them. I don't know if that's the reason for the loving response my book is getting, but I am grateful for it. Radical and not-so-radical Lesbians are giving the book to their mothers, sisters, and non-Lesbian friends so they can get the "feel" of what it's like to be a Lesbian.

I can hardly believe it. I have actually received fan mail! I keep hearing how funny the book is, how Lesbians read it out loud to each other, and laugh. Women who don't usually read books tell me they can read mine because the selections are short. After years of writing in what seemed to be a mostly hostile environment, I am joyful in the knowledge that Lesbians are reading and enjoying my work.

During my years of Lesbian feminist political action, I've been very lucky to become acquainted with Lesbians whose work enriches the Lesbian community, Lesbians who encouraged me to write. Some of them have praised the book in print. I'm a mostly unknown writer, published by a very small press, so their endorsements have helped a lot in selling my book. Their willingness to put their praise in print has had a profound effect on me, personally. Now I feel like the professional writer I am. Author Marilyn Frye (*The Politics of Reality, Willful Virgin*) wrote the introduction to the book and organized it into chapters. Blurbs for the back of the book were written by Julia Penelope (co-editor of the *Lesbian Culture* anthology, author of *Call Me Lesbian, Finding the Lesbians, Found Goddesses*, and *The Coming Out Stories*); singer/songwriter/educator/writer Alix Dobkin (most recent recording: *Love and Politics*); authors Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin (the classic *Lesbian/Woman*); publisher Catherine Odette (*Dykes, Disabilities & Stuff*); and essayist/editor Sandra Pollack (*Politics of the Heart*).

Essayist/peace activist Jan Meyerding and author Carol Anne Douglas (long-time member of the *off our backs* collective) wrote reviews praising the book for *Lesbian Resources* and *oob*. Gloria Steinem liked my book enough to write about me and my writing in her book *Revolution From Within*, and she let me quote her on the new book cover of the second printing. Robin Morgan told me that she and her

continued on page 59

excerpts from

ARE YOU GIRLS TRAVELING ALONE?

from "Looking For Lesbians"

Looking for Lesbians is a hobby I share with my companion lover Irene. It is an amusing pastime when we are at home, surrounded by women we know are Lesbians, but when we go traveling the back roads of North America in our motor home, looking for Lesbians becomes serious business. We usually stay in campgrounds in national, state, provincial, and county parks far from urban centers. As a result, we are not able to consult a phone book and then casually drop in at a local women's bookstore, bar, center whenever we need the sight of other Lesbians.

We started our RV expedition firm in the belief that *We Are Everywhere!* Over the years, we have honed our looking for Lesbians skills to a fine art, and to our delight have found us everywhere.

So what does a Lesbian look like? I smiled and smiled at a stunning, short-haired woman standing alone at a scenic view pull-off on a Vermont highway. She was wearing highly polished, flat heeled shoes, a blazer, a tailored silk blouse and sharply-creased pants. She slipped her hands, fingernails short and manicured, into her pockets and smiled back at me. We saw her again when she passed us on the road in a white Cadillac convertible with the top down. I honked and she smiled and waved as she sped by. Irene agreed the woman was a Lesbian and called me a flirt. She knows my fondness for the "blazer dyke" look.

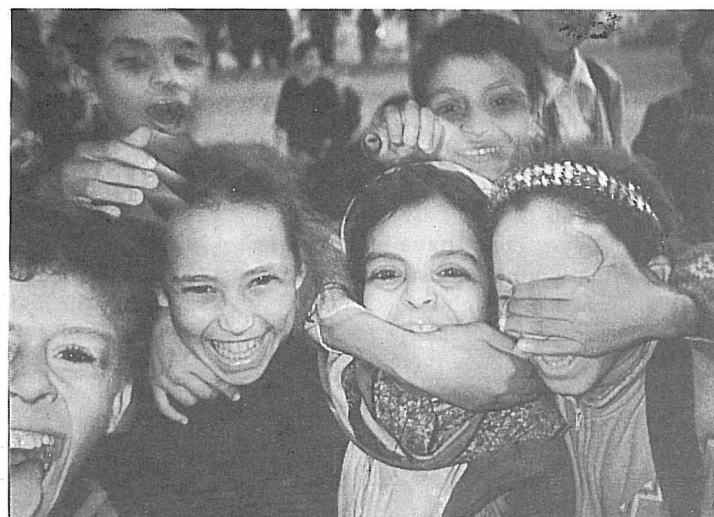
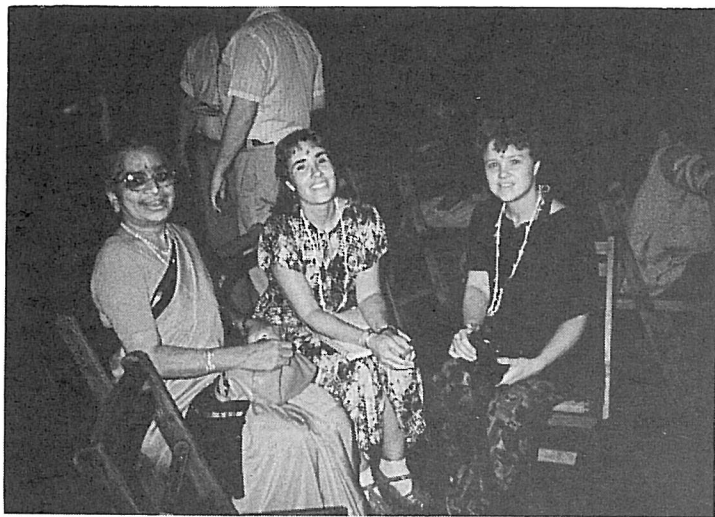
The Lesbian clues here were more subtle than clothing. The fact that this Lesbian did not "soften" the severity of her clothes with a "feminine frill" was encouraging. For us, the clincher was the way she flipped that jacket behind her hip bones in an unmistakable dykely way as she put her hands in her pants pockets.

.....

from "Lesbians Who Go Back To Men and Other Strange Occurrences"

....But what about the Lesbian who says she has met a wonderful, "special" man for whom she has strong feelings? She thinks she should go with these feelings. When I express horror at the prospect, she says I am no better than the Jerry Falwells who do not want us to act on our Lesbian feelings.

continued on page 59



Bonnie Morris

Dr. Mrs. C. Prabhavathi, Dr. Bonnie Morris, and Jennifer Cook (student) at a welcome reception in Madras, India. Kids in front of the new multimillion-dollar mosque in Casablanca, Morocco. This picture is a good example of why it was difficult for us to reach out to the girls we saw. In addition to physically dominating their girl peers, the boys spat on adult women.

SEMESTER AT SEA *from 25*

Rather Be Cute), Jewish women's ritual music by Faith Rogow (*Courage to Dare*), and a most powerful retelling of one Jewish woman's travels: "Miriam," recorded by Laura Berkson (*Laura Berkson*).

There. I was done. Or was I? No, one final tape was necessary—one sheer LESBIAN POWER compilation affirming desire, discovery, survival, pride, herstory. This tape began with two selections by Lynn Thomas, "Together, Proud and Strong"—the anthem of the 1993 March on Washington (and I'm one of the sixty-three artists on the recording!) and the hilarious "Dykes" (*Courage*). I added Margie Adam's "Long Haul" (*Another Place*), surely the ultimate team song for the lesbian/feminist activist, and k.d.lang's "Constant Craving" (*Ingenue*) to remind me that it ain't all politics and protests.

Naturally, I had to include the music that drew me to festivals in the first place when I was a teenage dyke—Holly Near's "Imagine My Surprise" (*Imagine My Surprise*) and Diane Lindsay's "Sweet Darling Woman" (as recorded by Meg Christian on *Face the Music*). I ended with two recordings by Jamie Anderson—"At Karen's House" (*A Family of Friends*) and "I Don't Know About the Night" (*Center of Balance*). But I had left out Pam Hall's "Linda" (*Honey On My Lips*) and Laura Berkson's "Marie"! Another tape, and another...

OFF TO SEE THE WORLD

On September 14 we sailed out of Vancouver and, armed with forty carefully compiled tapes, I was ready for anything. Within one day, lesbian students sought me out and found me ("We liked your

faculty picture on the wall"), and I made the pleasant discovery that I was not alone on the ship. My cabin became a sort of mini-salon as my women's studies students, both lesbian and not, found their way to a comfortable space where they were always welcome to talk, study...and listen to music.

From these casual listening parties I eventually introduced at least twenty students to my music collection, and humorous arguments ensued over the loaning out of certain cherished tapes to students in the throes of final exams ("Hi, can I borrow Ferron?"; "Can we play Lynn Lavner?"). I convinced at least two students to apply as workers for the 1994 festival season, and rewarded my best scholars with copies of the "Together, Proud and Strong" tape. After I presented a lesbian herstory lecture for a faculty colleague's Psychology of Gender class, students listened to Lynn's tape right in class. I had to remind myself that while these breakthroughs were occurring, we were on a ship off the coast of Vietnam...Yemen...Tunisia...

In Shanghai, my lesbian students and I walked for hours one night, tears springing to our eyes as we observed the people of our planet's fifth largest city—people who are unafraid to walk hand in hand with those of the same sex. Everywhere men hugged men, and women lay in one another's laps, caressing and exchanging confidences. The sight of millions of same-sex couples—probably not "gay" as we in the West define it—is my fondest memory of China. For all the unfavorable publicity about political repression and the one-child policy, the face of the China we saw was a loving society of people who are rich in friendship life. The constant casual

affection between same-sex friends in public had a tremendous impact on my students and I, fresh from homophobic America. We, too, walked arm in arm, free to do so at last—ironically—in a land we've been taught to call unfree.

In Morocco, on the other hand, my women students and I experienced almost constant sexual harassment, made all the more painful because it combined overt woman-hating with hatred toward our assumed American nationality. These incidents ranged from quasi-laughable (one of my students was told "Fuck you, fuck your country, fuck your haircut!" by a male vendor) to truly upsetting (I was spat upon—in crotch and face—by two nine-year-old boys when I visited Casablanca's new multimillion-dollar mosque).

After one particularly long day of ugly sexual threats and propositions (these despite my carefully veiled head), I was stopped in my tracks by a woman who called out to me in a city marketplace. Her friendly greeting of "Ah, my sister, you need a safe place to sit and drink tea?" would have been welcome in and of itself, but when I turned gratefully toward the voice, I found myself face to face with a real live lesbian! Of this I was certain, as I eyed her male clothes, short uncovered haircut, and confident gaze. She was leaning against the wall, thumbs in pockets—a hustler of some sort, but a familiar face to me. She took me to a quiet café and paid for my tea, saying, "No man will bother you here." And none did. I will be forever grateful for her love, this mysterious woman who was afraid to give me her address, whose name I now am reluctant to reveal.

In Japan I had the unparalleled opportunity to visit the all-female Takara-

zuka Revue, where women play both male and female roles in elaborate stage spectacles reminiscent of Vegas acts. Unlike traditional Kabuki theater wherein Japanese men portray women, Takarazuka offers its enthusiastic public performances by skilled actresses who dress and act as male romantic leads, courting and singing to other women from the company. The Revue is so popular (particularly with women) that it is sold out months in advance; only our status as American guests of the city of Takarazuka enabled my students and I to gain permission for fifteen minutes of standing-room time at the rear of the Takarazuka theater. We observed huge lines of schoolgirls shivering in the rain outside, hoping for a glimpse of a favorite star, an autograph, a souvenir. The allure of these gender-bending performers was also clear in the Revue gift shop, which did a brisk business selling posters and pinups of women, to women!

And always, there was the music. Wherever possible, I donated women's music tapes to collectives and individuals in the countries we visited. I was able to record fascinating examples of local "women's music" as well, such as ritual bell music performed by the Iban women

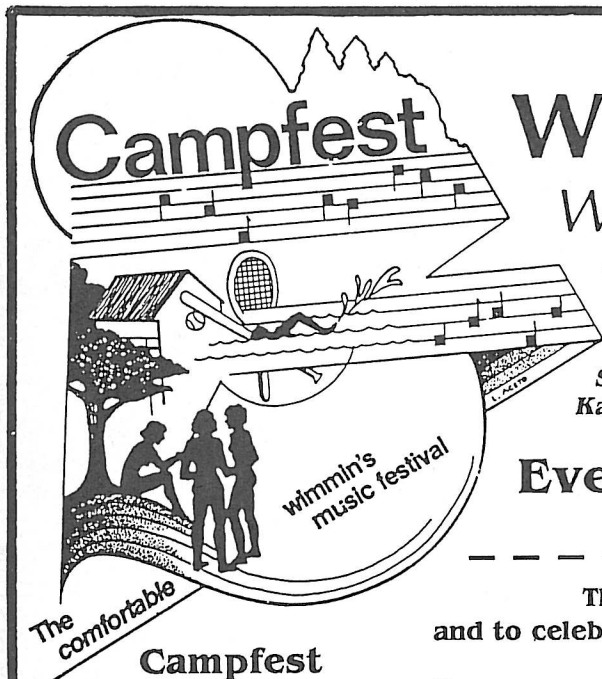
in the Malaysian jungle (they—not the men—are the traditional bell musicians in their culture); Turkish orphan girls singing folk songs and girls' playground songs in Istanbul; the folk chorales of the Ukraine; songs of the struggle of women peasant workers played (probably as propaganda) on Shanghai radio; and performances of traditional Chinese opera at the Foo Hsing Opera School in Taiwan, where very young girls learn to simulate the bound feet and motions of women in previous centuries. (This opera includes song roles for women warriors.) I define all of the above as "women's music," because it includes music forms reserved, culturally, for women and girls, though it's not necessarily feminist/political music.

In every country I also recorded interesting radio broadcasts, including women DJs, Arab and Israeli women news announcers in the Red Sea, talk show hostesses in Japan, guest artists on Rock of Gibraltar radio, and an English/Chinese rock show in Shanghai. I bought sample recordings by women artists. In Odessa, the port city of the Ukraine from which my Jewish great-grandmother fled at the turn of the century, I had the astounding experience of waking to k.d. lang on the

local radio station. Hearing the rich voice of another Jewish lesbian blasting across the airwaves of the former Soviet Union made me believe that in my wanderings I truly had come full circle.

As the four-month voyage drew to a close, I held a Goddess Babe initiation ceremony in my cabin for my fifteen students who had been such a sustaining force and inspiration for me and for one another. We celebrated our ability to transcend the countless restrictions placed on women in every country in our 100-day search for female culture and imagery. Each woman in the room then fed chocolate to another in a ritual to symbolize the sharing of resources and sweetness in global women's struggles.

Throughout this going-away party for ourselves, my music tapes played and I marveled that recordings I'd long enjoyed now had an added cachet of globetrotter memories...oh, yes, I listened to *that* tape in the South China Sea...listened to *her* music on top of a Moroccan hill. My tape collection went around the world with me. As a traveler, as a teacher, I am grateful to have had the exquisite company of women's music during my work on Semester at Sea. •



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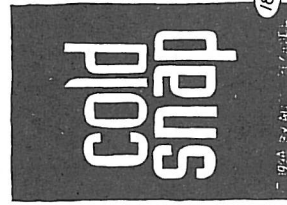
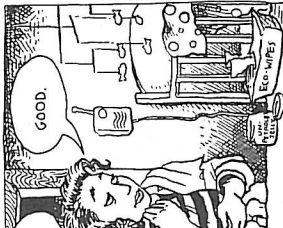


DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR

By Alison Bechdel

WOMEN'S WORK

©1993 BY ALISON BECHDEL



HENSONS from page 29

don't intend that. It's naïve to assume nobody will. Everybody's passions and prejudices have been whipped up," she says.

On the *Oprah Show* in late December, the Hensons and Andrea Gibbs faced off against three business-suited white male Overt representatives who relied heavily on the Bible to support their position that homosexuality is wrong. The Hensons have also made appearances on *20/20* (in January) and *The Jerry Springer Show* (in February); their story has been covered in numerous publications, including *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and *The Village Voice*; and their story is on America Online, the computer network.



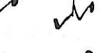



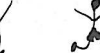

A gay and lesbian group from the university in nearby Hattiesburg has been helpful, as well as the Gulf Coast chapter of the Mississippi Gay and Lesbian Task Force. (The Jackson chapter, however, had not offered support at press time.) The Hensons want to publicly thank Robin Tyler and Suzanne Pharr for their connections and for getting the word out about the situation when it first erupted, as well as Alix Dobkin and Sue Fink for their continuing emotional support.

CAN'T KILL THE SPIRIT

Despite everything, the women are forging ahead with their dream. They have no plans of giving in to pressure from the anti-gay residents. "We live here now, and it is our desire to reach out into the community," Brenda says.

"They're not going to stop what we planned on doing," Cheri says. "We've got a right to be here as much as anybody else."

The buildings on the Camp Sister Spirit land will eventually accommodate at least forty people, and will be available for rent to groups who want to hold workshops on social justice issues such as sexism, racism, homophobia, or domestic violence. Everything they plan to do is consistent with the philosophy they have espoused since they met ten years ago, which can be summed up as "empowering womyn."

One little, two little, 
Three little Lesbians, 
Four little, five little, 
Six little Lesbians, 
Seven little, eight little, 
Nine little Lesbians, 
Ten little Lesbian 
Girls. 

Diane Germain

Sister Spirit is up for review by the IRS as a non-profit organization, and they worry that the town may try to cook up a technicality to "screw them." But they plan to persist with their plans, regardless.

Scared and depressed but still undaunted, the Hensons have scheduled their annual Gulf Coast Women's Festival to be held this year over the Memorial Day weekend. (Traditionally it has been held over the Easter/Passover weekend, but had to be moved this year because they say many performers canceled.)

The women of the fledgling Camp Sister Spirit Feminist Educational Retreat hope they can count on their sisters from far and wide to support them in this struggle. "This is an open conspiracy to deny me my civil rights," Wanda says. "Right now, we just need people to come and walk this walk with us."

Even if the town of Overt had welcomed them with open arms, much physical labor still needs to be done to renovate the place. The property includes a house that has been stripped to the 2x4s and an unfinished barn that needs to be turned into a forty-bed retreat space. They are still in the process of insulating their living quarters—the temperatures this winter were in the 30s, and their only source of heat was a fifty-five-gallon drum in the fireplace.

Cash donations are needed to offset the court costs, filing fees, and subpoena fees for filing lawsuits against a hate group called The Concerned Citizens of Overt. (And let's not forget about money needed to pay the mortgage on the land itself.) In addition to money and showing up to help with the physical labor, the Hensons' "wish list" includes an all-terrain vehicle, a gas-powered golf cart, a power generator, a CB radio base station, two CB car radios, surveillance equipment, six outdoor motion-sensor security lights, a chain saw, corrugated tin roofing material, building supplies (lumber, sinks, toilets, etc.), toilet paper and soap, kitchen equipment (especially large pots and pans), postage stamps, and even food. Sister Spirit, Incorporated is a community-based, IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) charitable organization, so all contributions are tax-deductible.

If you want to attend the Gulf Coast Women's Festival this May, or could go to Mississippi to help out for a weekend, a week, or longer, the nearest airport is Gulfport. To send money, find out specifics about their projects, or offer any other assistance to Camp Sister Spirit, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Hensons at P.O. Box 12, Overt, MS 39464, or call (601) 344-1411. •

ROUNDTABLE from page 31

SELENA: I think music critics should write more about how people contextualize their feminism, and [that] there are different ways to position yourself as a woman, in terms of other women and in terms of men. A lot of performers don't think about that. They just go out and do it. But thought should really be given to that. It's like taking control of how your message is conveyed.

KAY: Right, right. I think that's true.

ALIX: So the point is, we have to talk to ourselves and to each other and do things that we want to hear. If we stay true to ourselves, then it'll resonate in all conscious people, and we don't have to attempt to win over these guys. We're constantly being directed and pushed into this position of trying to get male approval for what we do, and that's suicide.

SELENA: God, you know I really wish that there were a lot more women labels. Just from everything you've talked about, I really wish there were.

KAY: I really wanna do the Lesbopalooza tour, which would go around the country just like Lollapalooza, but it would feature Bikini Kill, Girls in the Nose, Maul Girls...

ALIX: ...and maybe Alix Dobkin...

KAY: ...and Alix Dobkin, absolutely. Take a band in a *real* concert situation that gave people a *real* look at the way in which difference was being played out in the various bands and Alix. See, I just think that we need to just be out there as much as possible and keep sort of moving this along.

KATHLEEN: ...you know, Joan Jett wants to do a tour called Lotsapaladies!

ALIX: We're in a great moment of change here, and one of the changes that I can at least have some impact on, I think, are festivals, especially the Michigan festival. Somebody's got to break through and get onto those stages, and I think it will happen.

KAY: You know, if it's not Girls in the Nose, maybe it'll be Bikini Kill or somebody else. But it really needs to happen at Michigan. The music is fabulous there, but there's a whole arena that's just not represented.

KATHLEEN: I'm just amazed with just how thoroughly we've been kept isolated from each other. Do you know what I mean?

ALIX: That's right. That's right.

KATHLEEN: Like we've been talking today and realizing how much we have in common. And it's like really freakin' me out...

ALIX: It's the values, the sensibility, you know, where we come from. Everything is in common, except for that layer of style, and that's what's been used both consciously and unconsciously to separate us out, and it's got to end. And it will end. It's already ending. I mean here we are. •

REVENGE VIDEOS *from 15*

her, she can't resist the chance to participate in this psychologically complex game.

During the course of the poker game, Margaret feels excitement such as she hasn't known in years. She's in for a shock, though, when the "sure thing" of Mike's winning turns out to be not the given she was expecting. But an alert observation on her part cues her into the fact that playing poker with professional con men is never what it seems. Instead of being outraged, Margaret laughs with pleasure over the convoluted trickery she's observed. From that point on, she becomes increasingly enamored of mind games, and follows deeper and deeper into the maze of the professional con lifestyle.

Absolutely nothing is what it seems in this movie, which is filmed in a highly stylized, artistic manner. Margaret's been dealing with a group of people to whom even her intelligent, educated mind is child's play. What none of them expects, least of all Margaret, is what their game-playing unleashes within her. She not only gets cold-blooded revenge, but feels empowered by it. Is she better off? (HBO Video, 1987.)

A QUESTION OF SILENCE

Three of the four women featured in this brilliant Dutch film (written and directed by Marleen Gorris) are killers, and by its end, the fourth woman understands how easily she could become a killer, too. Any woman would, after watching this classic study in rich feminist polemics.

As a psychiatrist assigned to their case, Janine (Cox Habbema) is as puzzled as everyone else over why these particular three women, total strangers to each other, collaborated in the spontaneous murder of a man, a boutique owner who was a stranger to them. Their story is revealed to her gradually, in bits and pieces.

At first, not much of it comes from refined housewife and mother Christine (Edda Barends). She appears to be in nervous shock over her participation in the death. Eventually Janine learns that Christine had pretty much stopped talking even before the grisly act, though. Why bother to talk if no one, especially one's husband, ever bothers to listen?

Middle-aged Ann (Nelly Frijda), a stout, divorced waitress, is far more willing to cooperate with Janine during their sessions in the psychiatric prison where the four defendants are being held.



Novelist Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep) with her mother (Sylvia Miles) in *She-Devil*.

In flashback, and through crosscutting of her story with the others, we see how lonely and sad this seemingly cheerful and easy-going woman really is. At her job, the male clientele feel free to insult and demean her, and Ann, dependent on the lousy job for her living, can't do a thing about it.

Secretary Andrea (Henriette Tol), the last member of the group, is also willing to tell her story, but only up to a point. An attractive, sophisticated woman, Andrea seems more intelligent than Ann or Christine; and though she tells Janine a lot, she keeps challenging the psychiatrist to discover the rest of the story, to put together the pieces of the puzzle—not so much as a doctor, but as a woman. We see Andrea at her job, too. Her boss depends on her completely, without being aware of it, and during business meetings, other men feel free to steal her ideas simply because they didn't hear her speak them in the first place. After all, she's only there to serve coffee.

The film culminates in their courtroom trial. All along, the women have insisted that the murder went unwitnessed by others, yet we know from the flashbacks that other women were indeed present in the boutique on that day. Silently, they sit there in court and listen as Janine, who has come to understand the "motive" that so mystifies the men participating in the trial, tries to explain the state of the defendants' lives during the time of the crime. Issues of language and "objectivity" (whose?) are raised. The idea of murder as a random act of revenge against men in general is a concept the men in the courtroom, including Janine's husband, will

continued on inside back cover

SHE-DEVIL *from page 15*

women—"the unloved and unwanted, women like Hooper who the world had thrown away"—find jobs and self-esteem.

Feminists will enjoy seeing the many familiar woman-identified touches that are included in the film, including Mary Fisher's mother (Sylvia Miles) reading *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and pictures of Oprah, Gloria Estefan, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, and Jane Fonda on the wall. Rosanna Carter puts in a great few minutes as a powerful judge. Women of various ages, sizes, races, and stations in life are represented.

She-Devil also shows physical labor being done by women, from plumbing to building rehabbing. It makes clear statements against elderly people being sedated to keep them passive in nursing homes, and delights with footage of old women playing soccer. Many of the issues that are dealt with regularly in women's culture make an appearance in this film, in funny and poignant ways.

And revenge? Oh, you bet. Ruth is told by her philandering husband, "You're a lousy mother, a terrible cook—you're not even a woman anymore! You're a *she-devil!*" He can't imagine the half of it. Without divulging the plot twists, let's just say it's satisfying to watch Ruth creatively make him pay. (In the aftermath of the Lorena Bobbitt case, viewers may especially appreciate a moment when the camera cuts to Ruth cutting zucchini in her kitchen.)

Directed by Susan Siedelman, the film includes dialogue such as, "If you're a woman, there's just no justice in this world." We laugh and cheer through the whole movie as Ruth does something about that. •

ARE YOU GIRLS TRAVELING ALONE? from page 53

This line of reasoning is the result of faulty logic. Living a Lesbian life is good for women. Lesbians are physically and mentally healthier, are happier, more self-reliant, more independent, and they enjoy higher self-esteem and a more satisfying sex life than women who relate to men. In addition, relating to men is dangerous. Women who relate to men suffer physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abuses regularly. Even those "special" men we hear about drain a woman's energy, insult her intelligence, and expect her to serve them as their "privileged domestic" (a term I've stolen from Dr. Joyce Brothers who coined it in her 1984 book on men).

I think that a Lesbian who finds herself attracted to men could use the experience to better understand her still-enslaved non-Lesbian sisters, but it is not in her best interest to go with her feeling. That is worse for her than going back to cigarettes; the odds of harm coming to her body are higher with men!

I apply the same reasoning to feel-

ings of sexual sadism and masochism. Some Lesbians go with those feelings by incorporating humiliation, physical pain, verbal abuse, and bondage into their sexual activity. This, too, is harmful to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Play-acting "scenes" which parody the sadism inflicted upon women, children, people of color, Jews, disabled people, and poor people desensitizes the actors to the real humiliation, physical pain, verbal abuse and bondage suffered by all people in the bottom roles of our society. In similar ways, children are desensitized to the horrors of war and other kinds of violence by playing war, cops and robbers, and cowboys and "Indians." Here again, feelings can't be trusted. Like feelings for men, these feelings, if acted upon, can put women in danger.

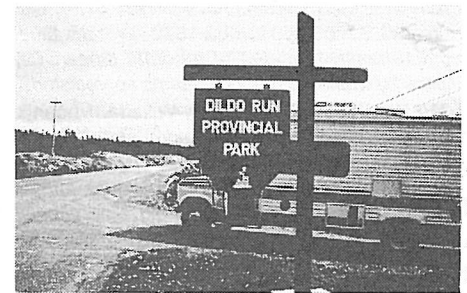
MARILYN MURPHY from 53

lover "fell in love with me" while reading my book. (Now, isn't that a reason to write!)

I was fifty-nine years old when *Are You Girls Traveling Alone?* was published.

Its publication fulfilled my lifelong ambition to be a "real" writer, to have a book published. And the book itself fulfilled another need, one I didn't know I had. I have been an active participant in the adventure known as the Women's Liberation Movement since 1969. I have done just about every type of action except menstrual extraction, but there is no record of that work. *Are You Girls Traveling Alone? Adventures In Lesbianic Logic* is tangible, material, durable proof that I was here, doing my share, at this crucial time in history, when women/Lesbians were creating our freedom.

I love knowing my name will always be on the book lists somewhere, as long as there are books. •



Marilyn Murphy

COMEDY from page 21

make sure she doesn't come on stage while the audience is still walking in. I've only seen Suzanne on TV, but I know she's very fast. I decide to do Muriel, a very fast-talking character, to prepare everyone's ears. Wake everyone up and set them up for her timing.

Suzanne is one of the best stand-up comics I've seen in a while. A natural. She seems like a speedy New York Jewish dyke, but she's not. (Jewish, that is.) In 1990, she entered a contest at Kelly's Piano Bar in New York City, did her three-minute routine, and won. She's been performing ever since, in clubs and venues throughout the country, including on *Caroline's Comedy Hour*, *Evening at the Improv*, the *Joan Rivers Show*, and *Geraldo*, and she's appeared at most of the women's festivals in the past few years. She is thoroughly hysterical, outrageous, and at home with her sexual and lesbian humor. Her physicality is tremendous—especially her rendition of her "meeting" with Martina Navratilova.

Suzanne is a really tough act to follow. Even though it's a comedy night, I decide to bring the pace down, to neutralize the energy a bit. The only way I know how to do that is to bring out my charac-

ter Sophie to talk about dreams. ("Hope is a memory of what is to happen tomorrow.") It's the best way I can think of to bring Karen Williams on.

This night is her baby; she has organized this conference. She's loose and relaxed. She lets herself improvise; talks about getting older. How she and her lover don't go out any more—they end up watching TV. ("I thought I was a sex goddess until I dated a younger woman, and then I realized I was the goddess of sleep.") She talks about her embarrassment while in a sex workshop with younger women. She saw they were into all kinds of positions, toys, and techniques. "I thought, oh my god, I've been doing the same position for years. I'm going to have to speak to the over-forty crowd now, and you would be proud of me. These younger women said, 'What technique turns you on?' I said, 'Power and cash flow. That's what I love now. You have a steady job, and I'm yours for the night. Fuck the technique. With money, you can buy technique.'"

At the end of each evening Karen gave out little presents—tapes, CDs, prizes, a plastic telephone that plays a tune. Right out of a basket, like a den mother. It was so cute. I think she's getting sentimental.

Next year Karen and Cheryl are planning to produce the National Women's Comedy Festival in Columbus, Ohio. I hope it's right in the center of town. More accessible. I know that Karen wants this annual conference to be for lesbians, straight women, and bisexuals. This was a great start. As with all good things, you start small. This conference certainly proved that laughter is the grease that lets us move through our lives.

The second National Women's Comedy Conference will be held October 7-9, 1994, at the Guest Quarters Suite Hotel in Columbus. NWCC, 26151 Lake Shore #2112, Euclid, OH 44132-1160. (216) 289-2939, fax (216) 289-5885. •

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ARTISANS & MAIL ORDER

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WOMEN PERFORMERS and SPEAKERS

BARB BARTON. Asarae Prod., PO Box 645, Middletown, PA 17057. (717) 697-8066. Artist representative: Cyn Ferguson, 715 W. Main St., Ellettsville, IN 47429. (812) 876-1616. *Product distribution: Goldenrod and Horizon, 1712 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI 48912. (517) 484-1712. Barb's second recording 'From the Eye of the Hawk' now available! She is an incredible guitarist and songwriter, with a voice that grows more powerful with each passing season. Available for bookings in your area now!*

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JAMIE ANDERSON. PO Box 42282, Tucson, AZ 85733. *Lesbian singer-songwriter/comic/parking lot attendant. "She's the anti-Ferron," says Suzanne Westenhoefer.*

KAREN WILLIAMS. Management: Bulleone, Cheryl Reed: (216) 289-2939, fax (216) 289-5885. *Diva of comedy and queen of improv. Comic, emcee, writer, workshop presenter, speaker, human rights activist. Concerts, humor and healing/ writing/sex workshops, comedy-writing lectures, speeches.*

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DYKES ON MYKES. Kelly Conway, 7777 Sunrise Blvd. #1800-151, Citrus Hts., CA 95610. (916) 725-5512. *Dykes on Mykes cultivates local talent to produce ongoing concerts and maintains a referral network. We also provide workshops on how to produce concerts.*

LAVENDER MUSIC. 40 Grange Rd., Rokeyby, Tasmania, 7019 Australia. Phone/fax (international) 61-02-479720. *Distributors of women's music. If you are interested in Australia, please send demo tape and glossy to the above address.*

LAVENDER UNDERGROUND. Jill Long, 7777

Sunrise Blvd. #1800-151, Citrus Heights, CA 95610. (917) 725-5512. *Produces multi-media art shows followed by a concert of comedy, folk, rock, blues, and performance poetry.*

LEFT BANK PRODUCTIONS. 104 S. Oak Park Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302. (708) 383-4700. *Independent producers of women's performances in a variety of venues.*

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NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMEDY CONFERENCE. 26151 Lake Shore Blvd., #2112, Euclid, OH 44132-1160. (216) 289-2939, fax (216) 289-5885. *Oct. 7-9, 1994, Columbus, OH. Dubbed "Hotel-Fest," this annual women's comedy event will feature national comedienness, humor workshops and panels, open mic night. Lodging and meals: Guest Quarters Suite Hotel. Shows: Capitol Theater and Ohio State University. Reserve early.*

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Separated at birth? Lisa Koch (right) produced some of the cuts on Jamie (left) Anderson's new album *Bad Hair Day*. (Pictured together at the 1993 March on Washington.)

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COMMON LIVES, LESBIAN LIVES. PO Box 1553, Iowa City, IA 52244. *Lesbian quarterly. Includes graphics, essays, poems, short stories, and classified ads. 4x/yr \$15. Add \$7/yr foreign.*

DYKE REVIEW. 584 Castro St. #456, San Francisco, CA 94114. (415) 621-3769. *Biannual publication includes 45 pages of book and music reviews, poems, comics, stories, interviews, ads.*

FANS OF WOMEN'S SPORTS. PO Box 49648, Austin, TX 78765. (512) 458-3267. *Grassroots organization supporting women's sports. Request free sample newsletter.*

FEMINIST BOOKSTORE NEWS. PO Box 882554, San Francisco, CA 94188. (415) 626-1556. *Trade publication for women's bookstores. FBN's "Writing Wanted" column is sheer inspiration for writers. Easily worth the price of the magazine. \$70/six issues, \$6/sample. Mailing lists of women's/feminist-friendly bookstores available.*

SERVICES

ALTERNATIVE CONNECTIONS. 520 N. Michigan Ave. #404, Chicago, IL 60611. (312) 494-1449. *Our members realize that ads/bars aren't effective methods to meet quality, compatible, sincere peo-*

Toni Armstrong Jr.

FEMINIST COLLECTIONS compiled by Phyllis Holman Weisbard. 430 Memorial Library, 728 State St., Madison, WI 53706. A quarterly of women's studies resources. \$7 subscription.

HOT WIRE: The Journal of Women's Music & Culture. 5210 N. Wayne, Chicago, IL 60640. (312) 769-9009, fax (312) 728-7002. Only publication devoted to national woman-identified music & culture scene. Music, writing, film, dance, comedy. Many photos. Each 64-page issue includes two-sided stereo recording of four-six women's music tunes. Last issue will be September 1994 (Vol. 10, No. 3). Send SASE for list of available back issues (from 1987-1994). Discounts offered if you buy back issues in quantity.

IN THESE TIMES. 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. (800) 827-0270. Committed to democratic social and political change. Weekly coverage of the nation, the world, the arts. Free sample copy.

LESBIAN ETHICS. L.E. Publications, PO Box 4723, Albuquerque, NM 87196. This lesbian journal has many articles, few poems, some classified ads. 3x/yr \$14 domestic; \$16 foreign-surface, \$24 foreign-air.

THE LESBIAN NEWS. PO Box 1430, Twentynine Palms, CA 92277. (213) 848-4469. The nation's oldest and largest lesbian periodical reaches more than 90,000 readers with features, news, columns, and classifieds. Monthly, \$35/yr; sample, \$5.

OF A LIKE MIND. Box 6677, Madison, WI 53716. (608) 244-0072. Leading international network and newspaper for spiritual women, focusing on women's spirituality, Goddess religions, paganism, and our search connections with a feminist perspective. Continuously published since 1983, 'Of a Like Mind' has come to be regarded as one of the best sources of networking information and thought-provoking dialogue. Articles, reviews, interviews, graphics, calendar, announcements, extensive networking section. Published quarterly. Subs. \$15-35/yr (outside US add \$10), sliding scale. Sample issue/\$4. SASE for free brochure.

ON OUR BACKS. 526 Castro St., Suite HW, San Francisco, CA 94114. (800) 845-4617. The most intelligent sex magazine just happens to be lesbian. Offers you bimonthly award-winning fiction, sexy pictorials, sassy columns, humorous reviews, and thought-provoking features. \$34.95/yr (6 issues). SASE for catalog. Send check, money order, or V/MC.

OUTLINES. Publisher/Editor Tracy Baim, 3059 N. Southport, Chicago, IL 60657. (312) 871-7610. Lesbian/gay newsmagazine; extensive women's music, comedy, and culture coverage. Midwest and national focus; includes international news. \$32/yr by mail. Also publish 'Nightlines' and 'OUT! Resource Guide.' Send \$4 for samples of all products.

SHORT FICTION BY WOMEN. Edited by Rachel Whalen. Box 1276, Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009. (212) 255-0276. Publication of short stories, excerpts and poems. Subscription 3x/yr, \$18/yr; \$6/sample.

SINISTER WISDOM: A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics. PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Quarterly publication of, by, about multi-cultural, multi-class lesbians. 4x/yr; \$17 domestic, \$22 foreign.

TRIVIA. PO Box 9606, North Amherst, MA, 01059-9606. Interviews, poetry and prose with an emphasis on women and art. \$16/three issues, \$6 sample.

WOMAN OF POWER. PO Box 2785, Orleans, MA 02653. (508) 240-7877. Women's spirituality.

WOMEN'S MUSIC PLUS. 5210 N. Wayne, Chicago, IL 60640. (312) 769-9009, fax (312) 728-7002. Directory of resources in women's music and culture. 4,000+ contact addresses. Performers, producers, festivals, publications, publishers, radio, bookstores, more. \$13 plus \$2 postage.



GROUPS

WOMEN'S INITIATIVE. AARP, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049. Organization helping to ensure that economic, social, health, and long-term care needs of midlife/older women are met.

RECORDINGS

BARB BARTON, *From the Eye of the Hawk.* Asarae Productions, PO Box 645, Middletown, PA 17057. Second CD from Barb, available through Goldenrod/Horizon; a mix of traditional and contemporary folk and some acoustic rock. "Bosnia" deals with the rape of our Bosnian sisters.

CAROLYN GAGE, *The Second Coming of Joan of Arc.* PO Box 12304, Santa Rosa, CA 95406. Live recording from the February 1988 opening of this play at the Women's Theatre Co. in Oregon. 'The Second Coming of Joan of Arc' was given the state's highest literary award, The Oregon Book Award.

DERIVATIVE DUO, *Opera for the Masses.* 1202 E. Pike #675, Seattle, WA 98122. Barb Glenn and Susan Nivert sing classical opera with a twist.

The original lyrics have been changed to ones which are more lesbian- and gay-friendly.

ELSMARIE NORBY, About Time Music Co., PO Box 2226, San Anselmo, CA 94960. (800) 995-0290. Six albums on tape and CD; soothing, reflective acoustic piano music (one album with flute) for reviving the sweet mystery that sound is to the soul. Brochure available.

FERRON, *Driver.* Cherrywood Station D, PO Box 871, Vashon, WA 98070. The sixth recording by Ferron explores how change and commitment interact with each other. Includes "Breakpoint," "Girl on a Road," and "Maya."

GAYLE, *Wave of Love.* Gail Lissauer, 4119 E. 5th St., Long Beach, CA 90814. (310) 439-7597. This recording includes "folk-pop-new age" songs such as "Echoes of You," "Live in the Light," and "Turbulent Master."

GRETCHEN PHILLIPS, *Gretchen Phillips.* PO Box 4600, Austin, TX 78765. Formerly of 2 Nice Girls, thought-provoking solo tape. \$8.50 each, postage paid. All covers are handmade.

HELEN HOOKE AND MONTANA BLAKE, *Verse-ability.* PO Box 888, Hoboken, NJ 07030-0888. Helen Hooke (of *Deadly Nightshade* fame) on lead vocals, guitar, and violin.

HOAPILI, *Mai Ka Pu'uwai.* 'A! Productions, PO Box 3275, Kailua-Kona, HI 96745. (808) 324-7205. This 1992 cassette is Hoapili's first recording. Done in the Hawaiian language, it includes the title track "Mai Ka Pu'uwai" ("From the Heart"), "Lei Aloha," "Lei of Love" and others.

HOAPILI, *Simply Hoapili.* 'A! Productions, PO Box 3275, Kailua-Kona, HI 96745. (808) 324-7205. 1993 CD; contains English and Hawaiian recordings of original and traditional Hawaiian songs. "Desire," "Queen's Jubilee," "Ullil E," more.

JUDY FJELL AND CRYSTAL REEVES, *Best of Times.* Honey Pie Music, PO Box 1065, Davis, CA 95617-1065. This 1993 release includes "Buffalo Gals," "This is My Body" (written for the Spring 1992 March for Women's Lives in San Francisco), and "I Was a Teenage Lesbian."

KATHRYN WARNER, *Glass House.* Fabulous Records/IMA, PO Box 253, Bodega, CA 94922. Funk, blues, romantic ballads, **INCREDIBLE VOCALIST!** Includes "Must Be Love" [heard on the September 1993 'HOT WIRE' soundsheet].

NEDRA JOHNSON, *Nedra Johnson.* PO Box 20308, Thompson Square Station, New York, NY 10009. Contemporary R&B in the gospel tradition. "Get It and Feel Good," "Where Will You Be?" [heard on the Jan. 1994 soundsheet], "Jubilee!!"

RACHEL BAGBY, *Full.* Outta the Box, PO Box 773, Hanover, NH 03755. The poet/songwriter/singer/teacher/attorney recorded this album using various vocal techniques, a simple percussion section, and few other instruments. Songs include "Praises," "Gratitude," and chants "Full Women" and "Forgiveness."

RONNIE GILBERT... Rare LPs for sale to collectors or fans. 'She Sings the Legend of Bessie Smith,' \$50 exc.; 'Weavers at Home,' \$25 exc.; 'Weavers on Tour,' \$25 exc.; 'Weavers at Carnegie Hall,' \$20 few scratches. R. Reitz, 115 W. 16th #267, New York, NY 10011. (212) 243-3583.

SHANTA, *Light Worker.* Storywiz Records, PO Box 199311, Dept. H, Chicago, IL 60619. (312) 994-5554. Uplifting stories with accompaniment on African instruments. \$10 cassette/\$15 CD, plus \$1.75 shipping each.

SHERYL SKYE, *Wading the Waters*. Soma River Records, 142 Boss Rd., Stockton, NJ 08559. (609) 397-8575. *Provocative, powerful. To order send \$10 cassette/\$15 CD, plus \$2 shipping.*

SUSAN HERRICK, *Soul Chant*. Ladyslipper, PO Box 3124-R, Durham, NC 27715. 1-800-634-6044. **NEW RELEASE!** *From the sensual "Thunder" to the playful "Climb Your Tree" to the soulful "Motherland" to the mystical "Soul Chant"...Susan Herrick's hotter than ever!*

SUSAN HERRICK, *Truth and the Lie*. Ladyslipper, PO Box 3124-R, Durham, NC 27715. 1-800-634-6044. *"You Deserve" (cassingle/gift pack w/card too!), voted best new song in 1992 and 1993 by 'HOT WIRE' readers. A listener wrote, "I met my true soulmate through the 'together listening' of your music as we were 'Slow Burnin'!...'One Moment at a Time'/'Never Have I' and 'Silent Friend'—I mean wow—these have been like a guidebook color-by-number to our flowing communication!"*

TOFA'AH, *Lights*. 199 Caroline St., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. (518) 584-2474. *Tofa'ah (translates to "Phenomenon") is an Israeli rock band comprised of eight American women—all Orthodox Jewish—living in Israel. Sung in Hebrew, the cassette includes "Woman of Valor" and "Mystic Waters."*

VARTTINA, *Seleniko*. Green Linnet Records, Inc., 43 Beaver Brook Road, Danbury, CT 06810. (203) 730-0333, fax (203) 730-0345. *The fourth album by the four-vocalist/five-musician Finnish folk band marks their debut tour in the U.S. Sung in Finnish (English translation on lyric sheet), this album has ballads, pop, and folk tunes.*

ZRAZY, *give it all up*. Velo, 4 Cross Ave., Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland. 6. Tel. 976541, fax 976719. *This Irish duo (Carole Nelson & Maria Walsh) angered their government by producing the song "6794700" (the phone number for the Women's Info Network), which provides pregnancy counseling. Available through Goldenrod and Ladyslipper. \$16 cassette/\$22 CD.*

BOOKS

THE ALYSON ALMANAC 1994-95 EDITION. Alyson Publications, Inc., 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118. *The reference guide has several lists of fun facts and info, including gay and lesbian slang, publications, organizations, history, and church policies, to name but a few.*

ANN VALENTIN AND VIRGINIA ESSENE, *Descent of the Dove*. S.E.E. Publishing Co., 1556 Halford Ave. #288, Santa Clara, CA 95051. *Discusses the spiritual realm and how to live happily and peacefully on earth.*

BETTINA R. FLORES, *Chiquita's Cocoon: The Latina Woman's Guide to Greater Power, Love, Money, Status and Happiness*. Villard Books, 201 E. 50th St., New York, NY 10022. (212) 572-2720. *"The only self-help book tailored to the every-day needs of Latinas, from high school age on." Also available in Spanish.*

BEVERLY PAKALA, *Don't Settle for Less*. Doubleday, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. (212) 354-6500. *Although 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, only one-third of the women awarded alimony actually receive payments. This is a woman's guide for getting a fair divorce*

and custody settlement.

CANDIS GRAHAM, *Imperfect Moments*. Polestar Book Publishers, 2758 Charles St., Vancouver, BC V5K 3A7 Canada. (604) 251-9718. *Short stories about lesbian women, their relationships with each other, and the world around them.*

JAN HARDY, ed., *Sister/Stranger: Lesbians Loving Across the Lines*. Sidewalk Revolution Press, PO Box 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224. *Stories, poems, essays about lesbians loving across differences of race, class, religions, ethnicity, size, ability, age. \$11.95 + \$1.50 postage.*

JAYE MAIMAN, *Under My Skin: A Robin Miller Mystery*. Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. *Battling "personal demons" while on vacation in The Pocos, P.I. Robin Miller finds she must resolve a murder, too.*



WOMEN'S MUSIC PLUS Directory of Resources in Women's Music & Culture

1994 edition
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WOMEN'S MUSIC PLUS
5210 N. WAYNE, CHICAGO, IL 60640
FAX (312) 728-7002

\$13 + \$2 shipping & handling

JOAN M. DRURY, *The Other Side of Silence*. Spinsters Ink, PO Box 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403. (612) 377-0287. *Tyler Jones and her dog, Agatha Christie, walk through the park and discover squirrels, trees, and a dead body. Tyler also finds she's the prime murder suspect!*

JULIA PENELOPE AND SUSAN WOLFE, eds., *Lesbian Culture: An Anthology*. Crossing Press. *Poems, stories, photos, cartoons abound in this 560-page anthology. Writers and artists featured include Jorjet Harper, Toni Armstrong Jr., Alison Bechdel, many "HOT WIRE" reprints.*

JULIA WILLIS, *We Oughta Be in Pictures*. Alamo Square Press, PO Box 14543, San Francisco, CA 94114. *Lesbian screenplays! Now showing in a bookstore near you, or order your own autographed copy (\$11) from Julia Willis, PO Box 183, North Weymouth, MA 02191.*

KAREN LEE OSBORNE, ed., *The Country of Herself*. Third Side Press, 2250 W. Farragut, Chicago, IL 60625-1802. *A collection of stories from a number of Chicago authors describing women in their respective cultures from Africa to Iraq.*

KATHERINE V. FORREST & BARBARA GRIER, eds., *The Romantic Naiad: Love Stories by Naiad Press Authors*. Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. *More than 25 short stories.*

KRIS KOVICK, *What I Love About Lesbian Politics is Arguing With People I Agree With*. Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118. *153 pages of witty cartoons/short essays touching on politics, religion, therapy, lesbians, sex.*

KRISTIN GARRETT, *Lady Lobo*. New Victoria Publishers, PO Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055. Tel./fax (802) 649-5297. *Young dyke jock balances a college basketball career and an interracial relationship.*

MELISSA KWASNY, *Trees Call for What They Need*. Spinsters Ink, PO Box 300170, Minneapolis, MN 55403. (612) 377-0287. *A novel about the relationship of three women and the changes they and their town endure.*

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER, *Parable of the Sower*. Four Walls Eight Windows, 39 W. 14th St., #503, New York, NY 10011. *This story, set in the year 2025, follows an 18-year-old black woman as she journeys from her small-walled California community to the violent world outside.*

PENNY MICKELBURY, *Keeping Secrets: A Gianna Maglione Mystery*. Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. *D.C. police Lt. Gianna Maglione trails a serial killer who targets the gay and lesbian community.*

P.J. GRIMES, ed., *The Eco-Networker Directory, Second Edition*. Earthbeat Productions, 800 Grand Ave. #AG8135, Carlsbad, CA 92008. (619) 632-0770. *This 60+ page directory features more than 1,000 local, national and Canadian environmentally supportive contacts. From vegetarian restaurants to publications to music and more.*

S. WEST, M.D. & PAULA DRANOV, *The Hysterectomy Hoax*. Doubleday, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. (212) 354-6500. *The authors say 90 percent of the 600,000 hysterectomies performed in the U.S. each year are unnecessary.*

SARAH ALDRIDGE, *Michaela*. Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302. *14-year-old Michaela is a gifted ballet dancer who has no money for classes. New friends offer to help, and past histories cause trials for them all.*

STEPHANIE H. PIRO, *Men! Ha! Laugh Lines*. Press, Box 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004. *Feminist cartoonist shares her view on relationships.*

SUSAN GRIFFIN, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*. Anchor Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. (212) 354-6500. *A look at the public and private pains caused by war.*

VANESSA ROBERTS PELHAM, *The African-American Child's Heritage Cookbook*. Box 3070, So. Pasadena, CA 91031-6070. *A large, easy-to-read, step-by-step recipe book encourages kids to participate in cooking. Includes African-American vignettes.*

SOUNDSHEET

Produced by Joy Rosenblatt



SUSAN HERRICK

MOTHERLAND

WRITTEN BY: Susan Herrick
PERFORMED BY: Susan Herrick (lead and background vocals, acoustic guitar), Marc Moss (electric guitar), Justina Golden and Joyce Zymeck (background vocals).
FROM: *Soul Chant*

Watchfire Records
P.O. Box 657
Unionville, PA 19375
(610) 486-6139

In the vanguard of the first generation of women raised on women's music, Susan conveys the uncompromising energy of the pioneering foremothers while establishing a richly original niche of her own. "Motherland" is her portrait of the Amazon. It is included on her new album *Soul Chant*, her most evocative work to date...described as soulful, passionate, rhythmic, mystical, and archetypal.



ZRAZY

ROLL 'EM PETE

WRITTEN BY: Joe Turner and Pete Johnson
PERFORMED BY: R. Jay Allbright (keyboards), Punky Allbright (vocals), Jimi Perkins (bass), and Melvin Broach (drums).
FROM: *155th and St. Nicholas*
Big Noise Productions
P.O. Box 141121
Cincinnati, OH 45250
(513) 381-1048

The mother/daughter team of Jay and Funky Allbright know how to create a groove. Originally from Harlem, New York, Jay and Punky exemplify the universal spirit of jazz. They believe keeping jazz alive and introducing it to new audiences—especially youth—is important life's work. Whether funky or laid back, The Sugar Hill Duo takes the listener on a musical joyride. Their first recording, *155th and St. Nicholas*, does just that. Audiences, enraptured by the sound, find themselves tapping their toes, snapping their fingers, and moving to the sounds.



THE SUGAR HILL DUO

Brigetta Shroyer

I'M IN LOVE WITH MOTHER NATURE

WRITTEN BY: Carole Nelson & Maria Walsh
PERFORMED BY: Maria Walsh (vocals, keyboard programming), Carole Nelson (tin whistle, keyboard programming).
FROM: *give it all up*

Velo Records
4 Cross Ave.
Blackrock
Co. Dublin, Ireland.
(3531) 2836535, fax: (3531) 976719

ZRAZY is an out gay pop duo based in Dublin, Ireland. In 1993, they released their debut album *give it all up*; won the Hot Press Music Critics Award for Best New Band; played London, Berlin, and Vienna; and finally made their U.S. debut at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. They played several clubs in New York, like Sin E in St. Mark's Place, and decided they wanted to come back in '94! "I'm In Love With Mother Nature" was described by a leading music critic as "one of the most important singles ever released in Ireland." This extraordinary track is included on the compilation album *Straight Outta Ireland Vol. 11*, (Scotti Bros.) as well as on *give it all up*.

WYNONA, WHY NOT?

WRITTEN BY: Jamie Anderson
PERFORMED BY: Jamie Anderson (lead vocal, guitar), Julie Wolf (keyboards), Deb Brown (drums), Steve Klein (bass), Dan Tyack (pedal steel), Orville Johnson (lead guitar), and Lisa Koch and the Whinettes (back-up vocals).
PRODUCED BY: Lisa Koch

FROM: *Bad Hair Day*
Tsunami Records
P.O. Box 42282
Tucson, AZ 85733
(602) 325-7828

This is a love song. Sorta. A little something from the performer voted "Best Baton Twirler" by the readers of *HOT WIRE*. Jamie's performed in almost every state in the U.S., in Canada, and in the West Indies. Last year she played at the National March on Washington, and her performance was featured on CNN. She figures she's out to everyone now. •



JAMIE ANDERSON

Toni Armstrong Jr.

HOTLINE from page 18

Cagney and Lacey stars **SHARON GLESS** and **TYNE DALY** reunited for one night last January to perform **CLAUDIA ALLEN's** play *DEED OF TRUST*. The production was recorded, and airs April 8 on WFMT-FM in the Chicagoland area....Marga Gomez's one-woman tour de force *MEMORY TRICKS* is in preproduction for public television's American Playhouse.

Czech artist **LUCIE BILA'S PRO-GAY SONG** can only be aired between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. because officials say it "could bring prejudice to the moral development of children and adolescents."

Congratulations to *THIS WAY OUT*, the only internationally syndicated lesbian/gay radio show, on the two \$5,000 grants they were able to secure for basic operating expenses. To see if it airs in your area, call (213) 874-0874.

DYKE TV is a cable access TV magazine that presents a mix of news, health, arts, sports, and music. The show is seeking volunteer video stringers to cover news and cultural events across the nation for its half-hour program. They are also looking for sponsorship on public access channels throughout the country. **DYKE TV**, P.O. Box 88, 128 Broadway, New York, NY 10002. (212) 343-9335.

REVENGE VIDEOS from 58

never understand. (Embassy Home Entertainment, 1983, subtitled.)

MS. 45

Understanding *Ms. 45's* message is much easier than following the twists and turns in *House of Games* or thinking through the underlying concepts in *A Question of Silence*. This low-budget cult favorite is the story of Thana (*Zoe Tamerlis*), a young seamstress who works in Manhattan's garment center, and who doesn't speak.

As she and her girlfriends walk through New York's busy streets, various men leer and yell suggestive remarks at them in a typical form of sexual harassment most women endure on a regular basis. Thana's friends urge her to join them in an after-work get-together, but Thana wants to go home, after first doing some grocery shopping. Juxtaposed with scenes of her as she shops is the terrifying sight of a burglar breaking into her apartment.

Her arms full with a bag of groceries, Thana walks down a quiet street on her

PUBLICATIONS

ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY patted itself on the back in its fourth birthday issue last February for being forward-thinking. Its **FIRST COVER** featured an up-and-coming singer with a cult following: k.d. lang. *EW* now has close to two million subscribers.

According to *Deneuve*, **MARTINA NAVRATILOVA** has signed with Villard to co-author three mysteries with **LIZ NICKLES**. The first one is due out in 1995....**FUNDERS OF LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL PROGRAMS: A Directory for Grant-seekers** is available through The Working Group on Funding Lesbian and Gay Issues, 666 Broadway #520, New York, NY 10012.

THE GAY MUSIC GUIDE includes reviews of dozens of CDs and cassettes by lesbian and gay independent recording artists, artist profiles, and the Gay and Lesbian American Music Independents (GLAMI) Awards. *GMG*, 147 Second Ave. #498, New York, NY 10003....The American Council for the Arts has published its second edition of *MONEY FOR VISUAL ARTISTS: A COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE GUIDE* (info on grants, fellowships, etc.). *ACA*, 1 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022. (212) 223-ARTS, fax (212) 223-4415....To get the **LESBIAN VISUAL ARTISTS** newsletter, *SASE* to *LVA*, 3543 18th St. #5, San Francisco, CA 94110....The Chicago Artists' Coalition has

revised their tax booklet (*ARTISTS' BOOKKEEPING BOOK*) for self-employed individuals. *CAC*, 5 W. Grand Ave., Chicago, IL 60610....Laugh Lines Press puts out **HUMOROUS BOOKS BY WOMEN**, with a specialty in cartoon collections. For a catalog of titles, *SASE* to *Roz Warren*, P.O. Box 259, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004. (215) 668-4252....Nancy Andrews's photo book *FAMILY: PORTRAITS OF GAYS AND LESBIANS* is scheduled to be published this spring by HarperCollins. *Nancy Andrews*, 1201 S. Barton St. #180, Arlington, VA 22204. (703) 979-9316.

SUBMISSIONS SOUGHT

WOMEN'S MUSIC PLUS is a more-or-less annual directory of **RESOURCES IN WOMEN'S MUSIC AND CULTURE**. The 1994 edition includes more than 4,000 names/addresses of festivals, producers, performers, choirs, publications, writers, publishers, bookstores, film/video/radio contacts, periodicals, etc. Send your listings to *WMP*, 5210 N. Wayne, Chicago, IL 60640. Fax (312) 728-7002.

The National Women's Studies Association and *Woman in the Moon Press* are offering a \$250 **PAT PARKER POETRY AWARD** for outstanding narrative poem or dramatic monologue by women from any background. Deadline July 31. *Parker Award*, *NWSA*, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. •

way home. Suddenly, a masked stranger carrying a gun darts out of a nearby alley and grabs the young woman, forcing her back down the alley with him, where he rapes her.

The horror for Thana isn't over yet; she still has to face the burglar once she gets home. What he does causes her to go insane. With an ordinary iron, a tool she often uses in the course of her job, Thana bashes in his head as he violates her, then drags his body into the bathtub, where she chops it into pieces. She bags each chunk separately, and—in the ultimate taking-out-the-trash scene—proceeds to dump the body parts in various litter baskets all over New York. Meanwhile, she's got the burglar's gun, and this she uses to...well, let's just say every creep and jerk who comes on to her is in for a surprise. Thana's indiscriminate revenge can't last, of course; watch for the climax at a Halloween costume party.

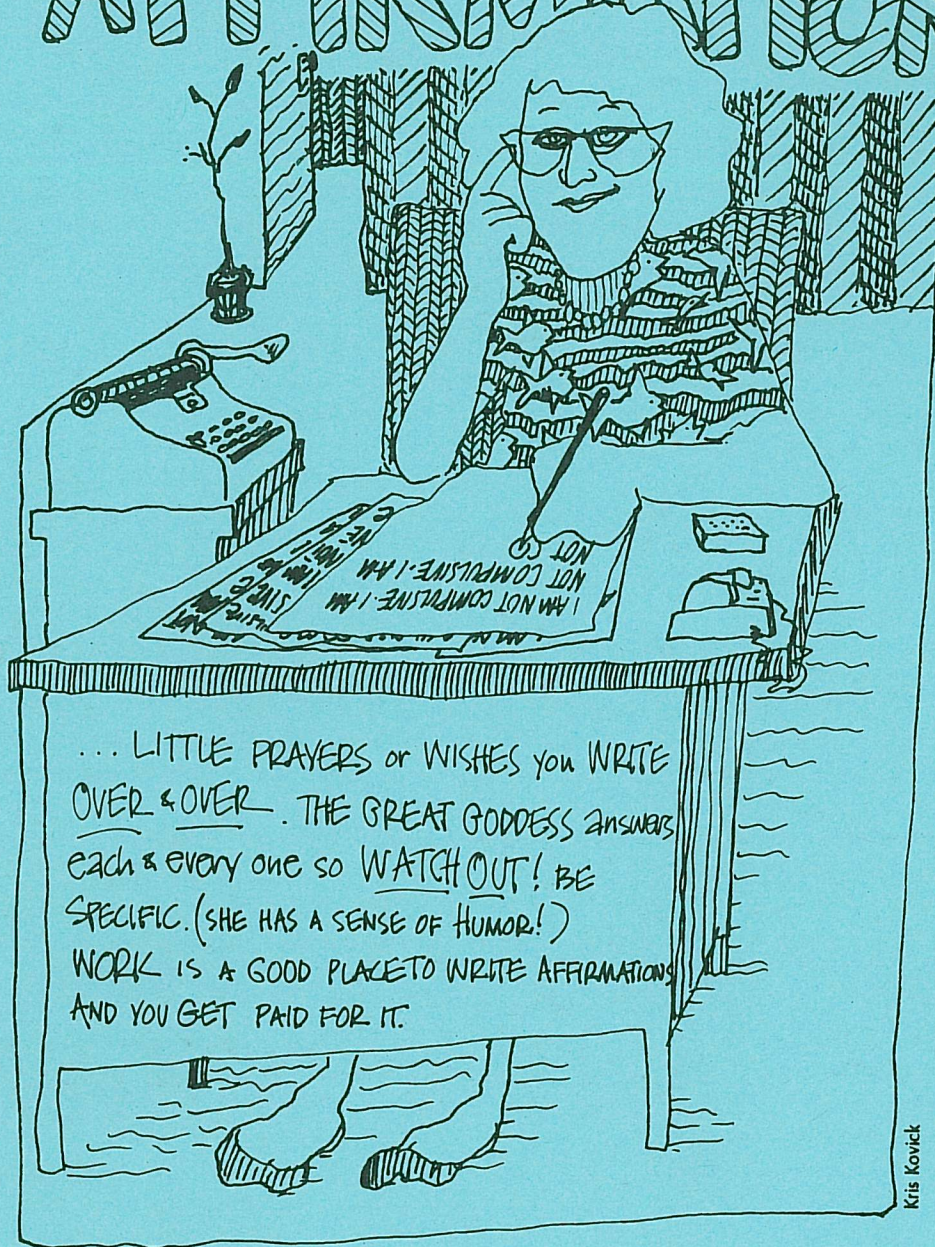
Yes, *Ms. 45* is a brutal film, but it's not overly gross nor bloody. It's possible for the faint-of-heart to sit through it, though you may want someone there to

hold your hand. You'll certainly want someone there to talk with about this movie when it's over, especially about the utter poignancy of the ending. As a victim of the entire spectrum of male sexual assault, it never even mattered to men that she never spoke a word. Thana had to be driven out of her mind before she found her voice—and then the language she learned to speak was the one men taught her: the language of violence. (Complete Entertainment, 1981.)

You've no doubt noticed how often the revenge sought in these videos is a reaction to rape. In researching the subject of women and revenge on video, the overwhelming majority of tapes I discovered—excluding a handful of titles such as *Carrie* and *She-Devil*—involved rape. The narrowness of filmmakers' imaginations as to why women might seek revenge was disappointing, and having to sit through so many rape movies was depressing as hell. But out of the mountain of crap emerged the five strong titles described here, none of which are exploitative, all of which are terrific. •

BECOME EVEN MORE OF WHO YOU ARE!

AFFIRMATIONS



... LITTLE PRAYERS or WISHES you WRITE
OVER & OVER. THE GREAT GODDESS answers
each & every one so WATCH OUT! BE
SPECIFIC. (SHE HAS A SENSE OF HUMOR!)
WORK IS A GOOD PLACE TO WRITE AFFIRMATIONS
AND YOU GET PAID FOR IT.