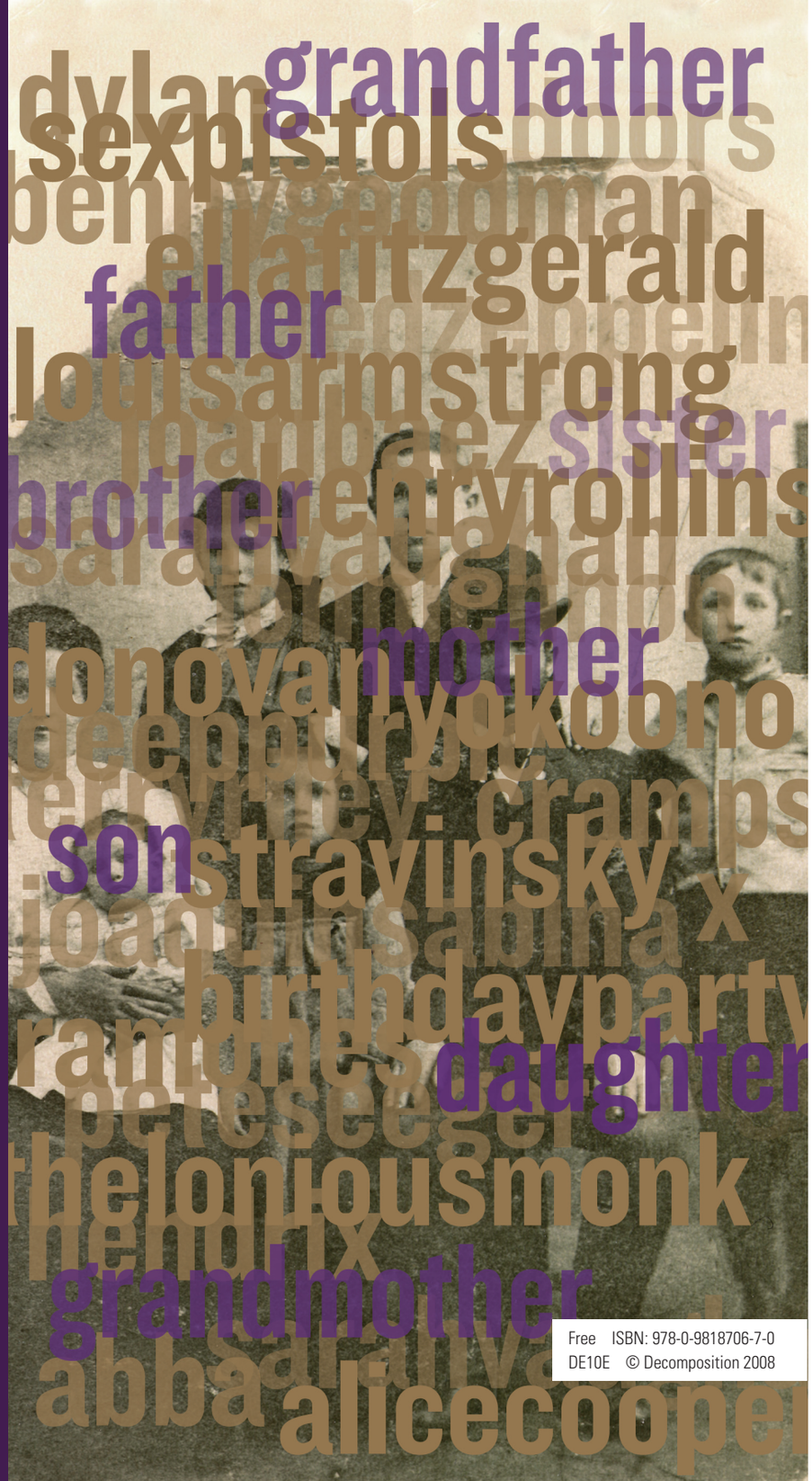

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INTERROBANG?! #5

ANTHOLOGY ON MUSIC AND FAMILY

WRITINGS AND INTERVIEWS

Edited by Sharon Cheslow

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Erika Anderson
Bill Berkson
Sharon Cheslow
Cynthia Connolly
Shaila Dewan
Alan Licht
Ian MacKaye
Kevin Mattson
Pauline Oliveros
Anna Oxygen
Janet Sarbanes
Jean Smith
Matthew Wascovich
Sara Wintz

SUMMER 2008

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#5 | SUMMER 2008

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Also edited by Sharon Cheslow: *Banned in DC: Photos and Anecdotes From the DC Punk Underground ('79-'85)* with Cynthia Connolly and Leslie Clague (published by Cynthia Connolly/Sun Dog Propaganda)

Dedicated to

Great-Great-Grandpa Chaskal Schnebalk

Chaskal Schnebalk immigrated to America in 1901 as a professional violinist from Kolomea, Austria (now Ukraine), with two violins, his family and one dollar in his pocket. After arrival to Ellis Island, his name was changed to Charles Schnabolk. He is my mother's, mother's, mother's father. Approximately 16,500, or 50%, of Kolomea's population in 1900 were Jews. Almost all were killed during the Holocaust.

The contributors to this anthology all explore the theme of music and family. Some are musicians who are impacted by family. Some have family who are impacted by music. Others write critically or creatively on the subject. Family can also be seen as a creative community.

Constant Nieuwenhuis wrote after WWII that "being free is like being strong; freedom appears only in creation or in strife—and these have the same goal at heart—fulfillment of life." Late 20th century music followed this impulse. Will the same be true of these times?

Enjoy.

S.C. May 2008
Los Angeles

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MY FATHER

Alan Licht

My father
(Irving Licht)
never "listened"
to
music
(born 1927)

He would turn on
the stereo
in the den
find
(raised in Hillside NJ)
an easy listening station
stretch out in his la-z-boy
(graduate of Rutgers University)
close his eyes
smile
and fall
(vice president of finance at Tishman Construction 20+ years)
asleep

I once played
all six sides
of 1/2 Gentlemen/Not Beasts
in that same room
(treasurer of Congregation B'Nai Israel, Millburn NJ)
while he
was napping

Never
Mind
The Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols
didn't waken him either
(died at home 2004)

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THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'
Interviews with E. Cheslow on Folk Music

Sharon Cheslow

One of my earliest memories is of listening to Bob Dylan records. In this memory, I'm 6 years old, listening carefully to the words of "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." I'm fascinated with the imagery and the way the words flow with the music through repetition. These are the lines that stick in my mind:

Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?
I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken,
I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children,

Heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin',
Heard ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin',
Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin',
Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter,

I met one man who was wounded in love,
I met another man who was wounded with hatred,
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard,
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.
(© 1963)

Over the years, I learned of my parents' involvement in the L.A. folk scene in the late 1950s and early '60s. My mother listened frequently to Joan Baez. I loved Baez's singing on "Farewell Angelina," a song written by Dylan. This is the verse that affected me most:

The machine guns are roaring
The puppets heave rocks
The fiends nail time bombs
To the hands of the clocks
Call me any name you like
I will never deny it
Farewell Angelina
The sky is erupting
I must go where it's quiet.
(© 1965)

The American folk music revival of the 1950s/60s had been an attempt to use the populist ethos of folk songs to address contemporary political and social concerns. My parents held progressive political beliefs, and in the late 1950s

they were supporters of the civil rights movement. In 1960, the year my mother graduated UCLA and became a teacher, my parents married. They became adherents of Reconstructionism, a progressive branch of Judaism that promotes liberal social values. By the mid-1960s, they were supporters of the anti-Vietnam War movement.

Unfortunately, when I was 5, both of my mother's parents died. My father, a Caltech graduate, got a job with the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, and our family moved to the Washington, D.C. area to start a new life.

My mother talks about this time in her life in bits and pieces. The lyrics that penetrated my brain left many questions to be answered, and I hoped my mother could shed some light on their meaning.

**

From a 1994 journal…I had a great talk with mom today about my early exposure to music as a kid. She said we used to have a ukulele around the house that was grandpa's that I used to strum as early as 2 years old. She said I called it my "tootar," because I thought it was a guitar. Mom said she always had music on in the house or on the car radio—either folk or pop.

**

From interviews done in 1998 and 2007…

"E" is my mother (name withheld upon request)

Sharon: Where do you think the musical background in our family comes from?

E: Well, my father played the harmonica, and he could pick things out on the piano. When I was younger and took piano lessons, there was a piano in the house. He would go over to it and—by ear—pick tunes out and play them on the piano. My father's father belonged to the Hassidim, and part of that religion is to sing a lot, so there were always songs. My father used to sing them and I'd hear them.

S: You were always singing. Maybe it's because we always had music in the house, whether it was listening to records or you singing. You played the recorder.

E: Right. When you were growing up I almost always had a record on the record player all day long. Because I love music. And like you said, I loved to sing... I still do. I've often thought of that as why you like music. Because you've always grown up with it.

S: What were your favorite kinds of music?

E: When you were growing up, when you were little, it was almost exclusively folk music.

S: How old were you when you got involved in the L.A. folk movement?

E: It was during my college years, probably when I was around 19 years old.

S: How did you discover it?

E: I've been trying to figure that out and don't have a good answer. I talked with one of my college friends and together we couldn't quite figure it out. We both agreed, though, that folk music was "just around."

S: You and your sister graduated from UCLA—you studied history and education and she studied art. Was UCLA a central meeting ground for folkies in the L.A. area? Was your sister involved too?

E: She was not involved. I wasn't aware of any "central meeting ground" anywhere.

S: Who were your favorite folk musicians?

E: Pete Seeger, the Clancy Brothers, Irish music, Peter, Paul & Mary, the Limelighters, Joan Baez.

S: What was your first folk concert?

E: I don't know, but this question prompted me to look through old calendars and things that I've saved. I found an entry for a weekend at Idyllwild in the summer of 1958 [*ed. note – Idyllwild School of Music and Arts had the first folk music program in the U.S., started by Pete Seeger*]. I also found ticket stubs for many concerts I went to dating from 1960 and on. I have a program from an April 1962 Joan Baez concert at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. The only other program I have is from a Pete Seeger concert in June 1965 at the Santa Monica Civic. It was a presentation by The Ash Grove where used to go for various performances.

I also went to the Troubadour and the Ice House for shows. Other ticket stubs and calendar entries are for shows with Bob Dylan, The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Theodore Bikel, Bud and Travis, Eric Darling, Harry Belafonte, etc. There were others I heard also that I'm not recalling now. Although I had many of their albums and was a huge fan of Simon and Garfunkel, it wasn't until 2003 that I *finally* saw them in person.

S: Was there a community of people who went to folk shows regularly at these clubs and, if so, did you consider yourself part of this community?

E: I really want to make the point that for me there was not a "community." I see you have always felt part of a community through your music, and that is a wonderful thing. However, I never experienced general folk music as a community. My friends and I were all into various things that interested us. For me, music was very important, but it didn't shape my whole life.

I suppose the closest I've come to feeling a community involving music was with my interest in Israeli music. I listened a lot to records of Israeli songs during high school, college and later. I was involved with Israeli dancing through Hillel at UCLA. That was probably the place where I felt more of a community, because we were a smaller group of people that met at Hillel regularly and danced there.

The Hillel office was just across the street from campus in, what was then, the Religious Conference Building. I was Vice President of Hillel, and I eventually taught Israeli dancing there.

S: What relationship was there between the L.A. folk scene and the L.A. Jewish progressive, intellectual community that you were involved with at that time—late 1950s/early 1960s?

E: I guess the connection would be that those of us who were progressive gravitated to folk music because it was there that we heard songs with messages on issues that were important to us.

S: You've told me previously that you went to a hootenanny in the late '50s where you sang with Pete Seeger. You mentioned you also saw Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee perform. Was this all the same event or two different ones?

E: I think it was probably the weekend in the summer of 1958 that I spent at Idyllwild. I wouldn't characterize it as a hootenanny. There was a performance by Pete Seeger, and I believe that this was the same time that I heard Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee perform. After the concert was over, we went outside and sat in the dark around a fire pit that had a large fire burning. The seating was in the round, on wooden benches, on a few levels, and it was a fairly small area. Different people would start a song and we'd continue singing. All of a sudden, past the last row, we heard this voice coming out of the dark singing the opening vocal part to "Wimoweh." It was Pete Seeger, who had come to join us and sing with us. An unforgettable moment. At that point the feeling of being at a concert changed to being more like a hootenanny.

S: What was your perception of hootenannies and what did you enjoy most about them?

E: My experience of hootenannies was a bunch of people sitting, usually in the evening, in someone's living room with some people playing guitars and all of us singing for hours. Word sort of got around that there would be a hoot at someone's house, and we'd ask about it and get invited. There wouldn't necessarily be the same people there from week to week. Usually I'd see new faces most of the time. It was very loose, informal and casual. So there really wasn't a "community" that I was part of. For me, such a concept didn't exist.

S: Do you think the late 1950s L.A. folk scene grew partly as a reaction against McCarthyism, given that Pete Seeger was blacklisted and the Hollywood Blacklist directly affected many in L.A.?

E: I think folk singers used their music to express their feelings about what was happening in the late '50s and into the '60s. I think by the time of the McCarthy hearings, more people were aware of what was happening politically and socially due, in large part, to the widespread access to TV and people being able to watch the hearings on TV. This was something new and contributed to the growth of interest in folk music.

S: What relationship was there between the L.A. folk scene and the anti-Vietnam War and civil rights movements?

E: Again, it was a way for people to express their feelings on the issues of the day.

S: You told me you went to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at UCLA—this would have been April 1965—and you brought me along with you. But I don't recall you went to any street protests. Is this because it would have been too difficult with children?

E: Most of my time in the '50s and '60s was consumed by my classes and studying at UCLA, teaching elementary school, setting up and running a new household after marrying, and then being an at-home mother and doing volunteer work with organizations like PTA and League of Women Voters.

Although I didn't go to any street protests concerning the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, I supported them. In 1964 I remember walking door-to-door, talking to people about voting against Proposition 14. Prop. 14 was called the "Fair Housing Act," which was misleading. If you were for integration you had to vote against the act, which is not what the title implied. I believe it was worded that way purposely to confuse people. Anyway, it passed. [*ed. note – Prop. 14 was a California amendment to repeal the 1963 Rumford Fair Housing Act, which forbade racial discrimination in housing. The United Civil Rights Council launched a "No on 14" campaign in 1964. The Watts Riots in '65 happened partially in response to the passing of Prop. 14, which was declared unconstitutional in 1967.*]

S: Were you familiar with the folk scenes in New England and Greenwich Village?

E: I wasn't at all familiar with what was happening with east coast folk music.

S: When you saw Joan Baez in '62, had you bought her records on Vanguard before the concert or did you go based on hearing her on the radio?

E: I first heard Joan Baez in 1960 while listening to the Skip Weshner folk music show that was on the air every Saturday evening. I always remember that he said, "Look at your VU meter and listen when she holds a note, how that needle doesn't move." Because she's so pure and holds it so clean. We had a VU meter, so we watched it and it was exactly like he said. I was awed by her voice, but I don't know if I had her records before going to the 1962 concert.

S: Tell that funny story about seeing Bob Dylan at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium with friends who walked out of the concert.

E: Oh yeah. Bob Dylan was just brand new.

S: How did you know about him?

E: Because of that folk music show on the radio we listened to…The story was that we invited another couple to go with us, and they'd apparently never heard of Bob Dylan. It was the first time we'd ever done anything with this couple. We didn't really know them that well—knew them from work—and they were obviously sitting there in agony. They really hated it. They were looking at each other and making frowns. And then intermission came, and they went out and never came back. They never said a word to us. They just never came back.

S: Can you talk about why Dylan was so radical at that time?

E: I don't know if the people left because they thought he was too radical or because they didn't like hearing him sing. At that time, February of 1964, his voice was a little grating. Some of his lyrics were not easy for some people to understand or interpret. To me, he was a great poet and captured what I was feeling about the times in his songs such as "Blowin' In The Wind" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

S: Did you ever see that documentary on him called *Don't Look Back* when it came out? It was made in 1967.

E: I'm not sure.

S: I was really inspired by it. In this movie, it's clear how brilliant he is.

E: What he's so brilliant in is his poetry. His images are just fantastic. He captures things in words that are amazing.

S: Exactly. And you know I think that must have had an influence on me when I was little. Because I can remember listening to Bob Dylan with you guys, and really being affected by the images, like on "The Times They Are A-Changin'." And on "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall"—the tongueless people and the sounds whispering.

E: Yeah.

S: It's heavy, heavy duty stuff for a 6-year-old to be listening to.

E: Right. I think Paul Simon writes beautiful poetry too.

S: And you guys liked Donovan, right?

E: Yeah, we had his records.

S: Well, that was an interesting thing in the movie. Bob Dylan went over to the UK on tour in '65 and heard Donovan for the first time and liked him. And it made all the papers—Bob Dylan likes Donovan.

E: Oh, that's funny.

S: Were you aware of what happened at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, where Dylan played electric guitar with a band and people booed? The mythology is that folkies felt he was betraying his purist folk roots, although some say the booing was simply because the sound was bad. I recall that you didn't like his post-1965 music, so I'm curious about this.

E: I just hated the sound of electronic music at the time, especially when it was very loud. To me, it took away the warmth of acoustic music and it seemed to me that it was a barrier between the performer and the audience.

S: Did you like folk-rock? You listened to Simon and Garfunkel and Donovan in the mid-late '60s, but I don't recall that you liked L.A. folk-rock bands like the Byrds or Buffalo Springfield.

E: I'm not really sure what the definition of folk-rock is, so I'm not sure what to answer here. I was, and am, a huge admirer of Simon and Garfunkel. I think the Donovan record was bought for you as a child. I would always be singing something around the house, so if Donovan was playing I'd be singing along anyway. Parenthetically, this is the reason I could never identify with "punk" music—I couldn't sing along, and couldn't even understand the words being sung, although I might have agreed with their message. Also the loud noise bothered me.

Thinking about music other than folk music, it occurred to me that I didn't mention anything about how much I liked the Beatles. I remember where I was the first time I heard them, probably in 1965. I had the car radio on and was waiting at a traffic light at La Cienega Blvd. You and your sister were in the car also. "Yesterday" started playing, and I was struck by the beauty of the music and its lyrics. It grabbed my attention and left an indelible impression.

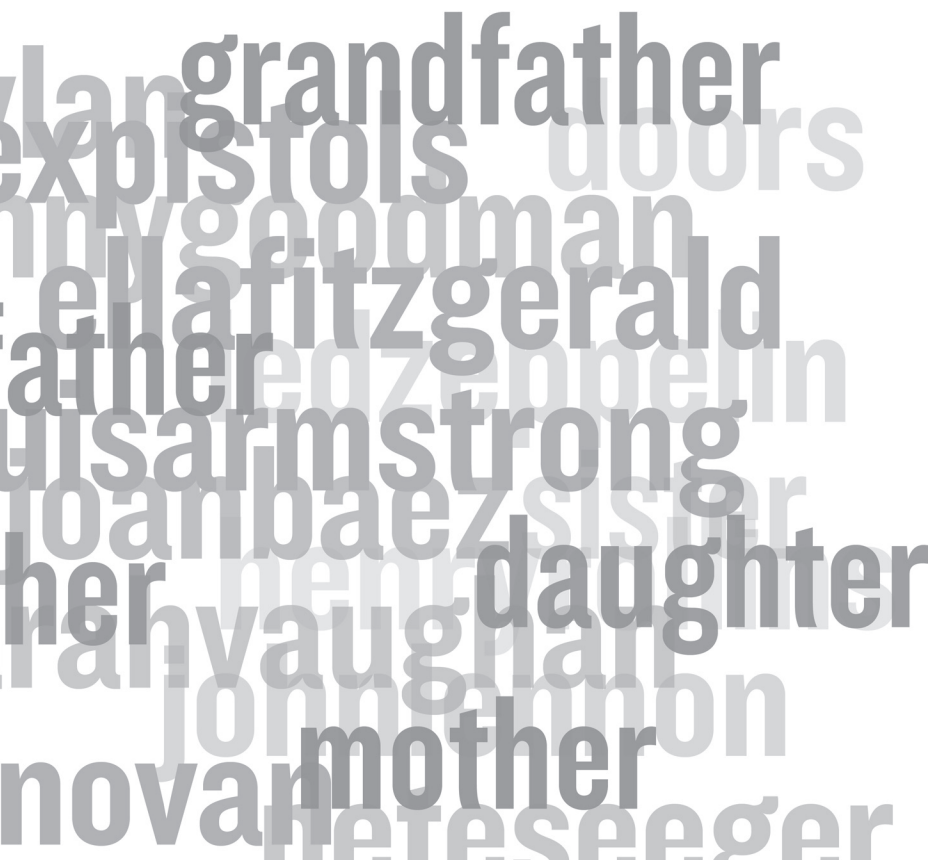
S: When you moved to the Washington, D.C. area in the late '60s, did you find that there was any kind of folk scene or community there? I recall you took me to see Pete Seeger at Lisner Auditorium in 1971,

and you also saw Arlo Guthrie—but I don't recall you went to many other folk concerts in the D.C. area.

E: Again, I didn't feel part of any folk community. I actually went to many performances in the D.C. area, though. In the early '70s, bluegrass music became very popular in the D.C. area and I liked it. I used to go to the Red Fox Inn in Bethesda to hear the Seldom Scene. Subsequently, over the years I've seen them perform many times in different locations. I went to several outdoor festivals and heard singers at Glen Echo Park. I saw The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem perform many times in the D.C. area in Lisner Auditorium and various other places. Wolf Trap was another location where I remember hearing Harry Belafonte, Peter, Paul, and Mary and others. I also listened to a folk music show on the radio that was around for a few years when I first moved to the D.C. area. In later years, Mary Cliff had a folk radio show I listened to also.

S: Did you ever think of being a solo folk artist or of singing in a folk band?

E: Oh my goodness, no!


grandfather
ella fitzgerald
daughter
mother

VERA'S JAZZ HISTORY
An Interview with Vera Connolly

Cynthia Connolly

I was asked by Sharon to participate in the next issue of *Interrobang?!*. She mentioned how she was going to be interviewing her mom on her involvement in the folk scene in Los Angeles in the '50s and '60s. Coincidentally, my mom—Vera Connolly—was involved in the jazz scene in the 1950s in Los Angeles. I suggested that we ask similar questions to both our moms to compare the answers. We discovered outside of the email interviews, that they graduated from UCLA a year apart from each other, yet did not know each other. My mother went to a high school very close to Sharon's mom's high school. More interestingly, neither mom said they were involved in any folk or jazz community. They just went and saw shows, yet from our view were avid fans.

Both Vera and I grew up in Los Angeles, California. Vera was born and raised in Hollywood, with a short stay during the depression, when she was very young, in Phoenix, Arizona. She married in the early '60s, divorced and went to law school in the early '70s. She moved with her two daughters of 16 and 14 years of age to Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1981. It was there that the two daughters, Cynthia and Anna Connolly, became involved in the D.C. punk music scene. With this interview, I talked to my mom about how her jazz scene was equal to the punk music scene as far as charting out new musical territory, both musically and socially. I wondered what my nephews might become interested in over the next ten years, when they become 15 and 13 here in Arlington, Virginia.

**

Cynthia: Where do you think the musical background in our family comes from?

Vera: I don't really know. My parents both enjoyed music, although neither played a musical instrument. They would occasionally play Russian folk, Cossack choir and Gypsy music. They had parties in our home where people sang and played the piano. I never heard anything about their parents' interest or talent in music, however. My best friend, Eileen Danelian, who went to most of the jazz shows with me in the '50s, grew up in a home where Turkish music was played frequently. Her family had parties where people performed also. Her father played the bongos, her cousin the oud or lute, and another cousin the banjo and guitar. I heard some of that also.

C: How old were you when you first started listening to jazz?

V: I was probably 4 years old.

C: How did you discover it?

V: We lived in Phoenix, Arizona, in the late '30s, and my brother was a radio announcer/disc jockey on the local radio station, KOY. My mother frequently had the radio on when he was broadcasting, and he played a lot of jazz. His best friend for many years, Jack Hiss, played the drums and was an avid jazz fan, and they had that love of jazz in common.

The same Jack Hiss introduced me to jazz more formally when I was 12 years old in 1947. Of course, in the meantime, I must have been listening to jazz on the radio. Jack came over to our house and brought me Benny Goodman's *1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*. We spent many hours listening to it as he would describe the various instruments, the performers, etc. As it turns out, that concert is considered a classic. I can still hear in my mind, "Sing, Sing, Sing," one of the most famous performances on the collection that he focused on especially. His love and enthusiasm for the music was contagious. I was very fortunate to have had such a friend and teacher. Through the years, we also went to hear jazz performances in town occasionally. Several years ago, while I was driving up PCH to Ventura, CA to be with him during his final days, I heard a familiar tune on the radio—it was "Sing, Sing, Sing"!! I probably hadn't heard it for 20 years! I will never forget that very moving experience.

C: What was your first jazz concert?

V: Probably the Lionel Hampton, Billy Eckstine and Jimmy Witherspoon Concert at Wrigley Field, in Los Angeles on July 8, 1951. My father drove my friend Eileen and I there. It was in a very scary neighborhood for us. At that time, L.A. was totally segregated, and this area was all African American as was the audience. The show started late, but by about 3:30, a lot of people were drunk, and dancing up and down the aisles wildly. One man came up to me, and patted my head, and said, "Hi, Blondie!" Many of the women were dressed beautifully, with hats on, etc. The show was terrific, but we sat there not knowing what to expect next! When it was finally over, we had to take public transportation home. It must have taken us two hours to get home. We were sixteen. Sixteen in the '50s was far more protected than it is now. It was a very conservative age. I still can't believe we had this adventure and that my father let us stay there. My friend agrees that our parents had a lot of confidence in us.

C: Who were your favorite jazz performers?

V: There were so many. Benny Goodman, of course, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald, Anita O'Day, Sarah Vaughan, Stan Kenton, Stan Getz and Gerry Mulligan. I was fortunate enough to see most of them perform in clubs in L.A.—the Haig, Tiffany's and Eddie's Oasis in the '50s. That was the "cool jazz" era. I particularly liked Gerry Mulligan's group. I heard him when he was playing with Chet Baker and Chico Hamilton at the Haig—a small club near Wilshire Blvd. They were pretty "far out" at the time. I also enjoyed Howard Rumsey and His Lighthouse All Stars who played at The Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach. He had some of the top jazz performers play with this group for years.

In the early '70s, I went several times to the Bel Air Hotel to hear Ann Richards perform. She sang there in their beautiful piano bar, accompanied by a terrific pianist, and still had quite a following. She had performed with Stan Kenton in the early '50s and was married to him for a few years. He had some of the best jazz singers perform with him—Anita O'Day, June Christie and Chris Connors.

C: You graduated from UCLA in 1961. Were there a lot of students there who were into jazz?

V: Not that I recall. It was a time of studying and work and because it was a commuter school, outside activities weren't shared very much. I lived in San Francisco and attended college there just for one semester with my friend, Eileen. We lived in a women's residence club on Powell Street, one block from the Fairmont Hotel. We heard that Tony Bennet was going to be singing at the Fairmont, so we splurged and went to hear him. It was in the beautiful Venetian Room. He sang a few of our favorites, and then sang a new song, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." Of course the audience just loved it. I was very disappointed in him, thinking that he was just pandering to the San Francisco audience, and that the song wouldn't work in any other venue. It was the premiere of the song, and of course it became his signature piece and continues to be the favorite of audiences to this day!

C: Were you part of a local jazz scene?

V: No, not really. I just went to various concerts and clubs with my friends. In 1951, I went to the Shrine Auditorium to see Stan Kenton and to the Philharmonic Auditorium, Norman Granz's Jazz at the Philharmonic performance, with an array of stars, and my brother took us to a Frankie Laine, Les Brown and Nat King Cole Concert at the Shrine Auditorium in 1950. There was a lot going on!!!

C: Were you into Beat poetry as well, given that there was a relationship between the Beats and jazz music?

V: No. I missed that.

C: What was your perception of the relationship between jazz and the civil rights movement?

V: I was involved with raising my family at that time and didn't get a sense of that relationship. I do recall that several of the more famous musicians refused to perform in places where there was segregation.

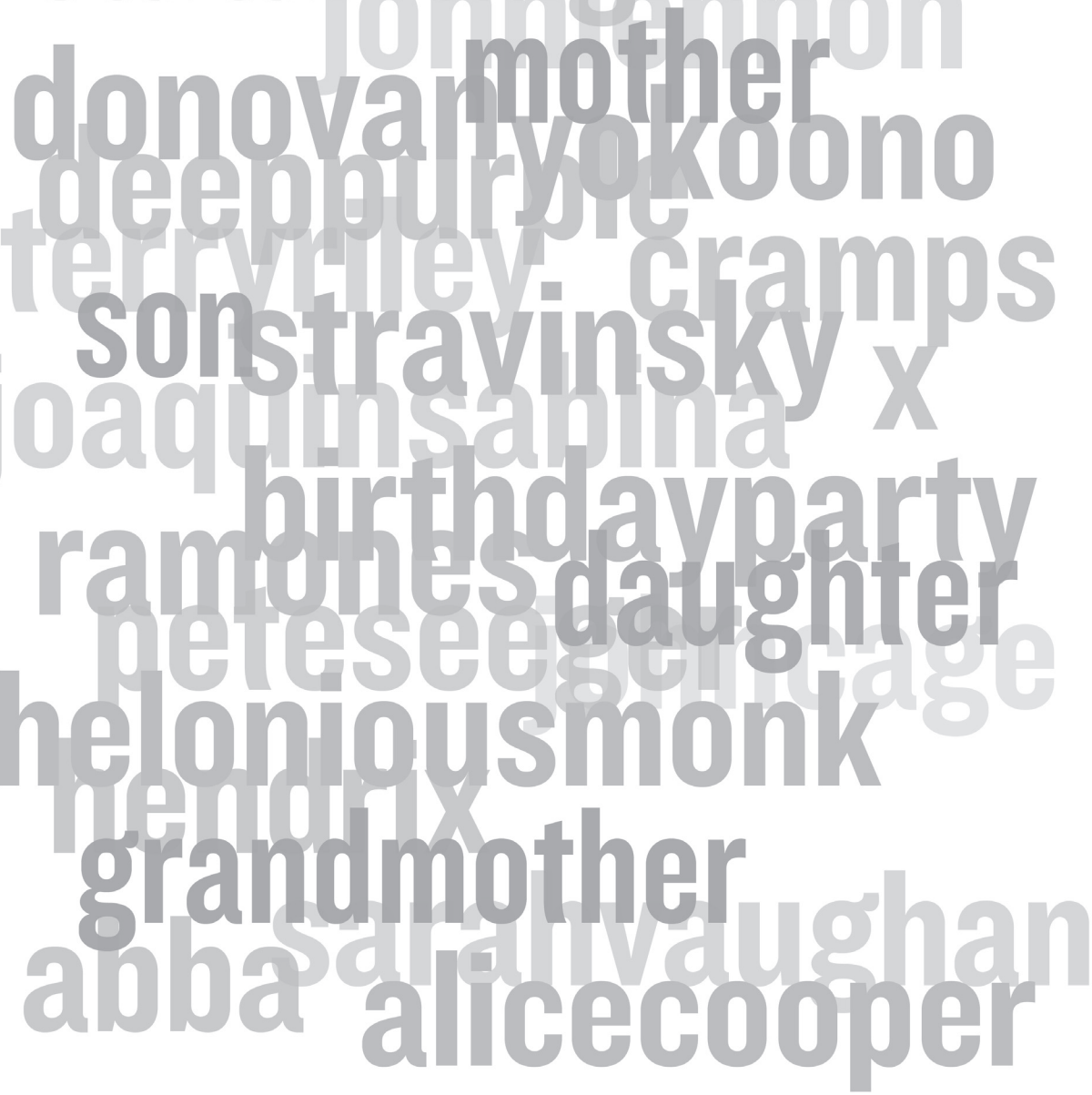
C: When you moved to Washington, D.C., did you continue to go to jazz shows there?

V: Yes. There were, and still are, some good clubs in D.C. My favorite is Blues Alley, where the last performer I saw was Maynard Ferguson. There are concerts as well, many held at the Kennedy Center, and there used to be a D.C. Jazz and Blues Festival. I also have gone to Manhattan to see jazz in clubs. One summer, I went to the Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island (in the '80s) where I saw Mel Torme and Dave Brubeck, among others. That was an amazing experience! It's a beautiful, relaxing setting to listen to great music. I even went back to California and went to a Newport Jazz Festival there with my friend Jack Hiss, who had introduced me to jazz. That didn't compare to the East Coast festival, but it was still fun. I've also been a few times to the KC Jazz Club at the Kennedy Center and the Friday night concerts at the Smithsonian.

BLOOD TYPE

Sara Wintz

House there are sounds of
my mother in the kitchen,
sound of my father downstairs
my brother off in his room,
watching television while
fingering this sweater my grandfather gave me,
my grandmother's, and the sweater
I took from my grandfather's closet
after he died. Ways of holding onto things.
listening to scratched records together,
my great-grandfather;
the woods surrounding my grandparents' cabin.
My grandfather opening a bottle of wine
from the year he was born,
as his father sang through the phonograph.
Sounds that have surrounded me,
ever since birth. The clubs where I grew up,
dancing with people I can't remember
what my parents said I did. House where my
brother is learning the same song
my great-grandfather played with his big band
and the way it changes slightly from
the way my father played it, and his father.
Where I am, making the sounds
of my keyboard, typing.


mother
donovan
yokoono
deeppurple
terryriley
cramps
son
stravinsky
x
joaquinsabina
birthdayparty
ramones
daughter
peteseeger
heritage
heloniousmonk
hendrix
grandmother
sarahvaughan
abba
alicecooper

FINDING THE MUSIC

Bill Berkson

In the 1940s and '50s when I was growing up, the world was full of recorded music. This was the time that Musak entered the workplace, hotel lobbies and restaurants swayed with string arrangements, radio and television introduced the latest pop hits (as well as now-inconceivable hours of live symphony and opera broadcasts). A restaurant around the corner from our apartment building called itself La Mer and had Debussy piped in non-stop. With my parents I went to Broadway shows, movie musicals, and an occasional concert, especially if, as was the case with Judy Garland, the performer was a family friend. I remember both her Carnegie Hall and Palace shows, and how, at our party after the latter, there was a piano in the apartment for the first and only time. Music wasn't much of a factor in my parents' private lives. We had radios throughout the house and in the family car, and by 1947 or so, a television set, but these were usually tuned to shows that featured music, if at all, only incidentally. Mostly it was news, comedy shows like Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Jack Benny, and Fred Allen, and the morning breakfast shows Tex and Jinx, and Dorothy and Dick. The one record player, a portable, somehow fell to me, along with whatever 78s or LPs arrived in the house—promo copies my father brought home from his work as a news service executive or gift from show-business friends.

Alone in my room with my boxy phonograph I entered this mysterious region of more or less organized sound, about which no one I knew spoke. It wasn't until I was in my teens that a friend confided a taste for the same catch-as-catch-can jazz recordings—which really meant anything from Benny Goodman to Chet Baker—that I had ferreted out for myself—just how I don't remember. As with most things, I had no taste but some burgeoning instinct; as happened with my first dalliances with poetry later, I was prepared to like just about anything. At around age 11, I liked—by this time, on 45s I bought in a cramped store on 86th Street near Third—Guy Mitchell, Louis Armstrong's "I Get Ideas," Teresa Brewer, just about any Broadway cast album, the Four Aces, Les Brown and his Band of Renown, Kay Starr, Vaughn Monroe's "Ghost Riders in the Sky," and (because a girl I knew was taking ballet lessons) "Swan Lake."

This was long before Thelonious Monk, Morton Feldman, Ornette Coleman, Anton Webern and John Cage entered the picture.

The point a lot of the music made was energy—an expansive declaration and release that otherwise amid the low-key assurances of an advantageous

upper-middle-class childhood was absent, practically, it seemed, unmentionable. The greater energy release, I understood much later—first with the R&B revelations on the Moondog Show, tuned into late one night by accident in the dark, and then with my wandering unsuspectingly into the 1954 Birdland All Stars Concert and witnessing the Basie band together with both Billie Holiday (a wreck at the time) and Sarah Vaughan—was that of compensatory culture.

Apparently, my parents had no need of any of this. They went out to supper clubs in groups with friends, and occasionally my father would do a brief comic dance turn to amuse me. I don't recall either of them ever singing a note or referring in any way to a musical performance. The fashion shows my mother produced as a publicist for American designers always had stylish music, presumably with her approval. When as a grown-up I finally asked her why she and my father never listened to music she said, "I spent every day talking, talking to people, in the office and on the phone. When I got home, all I wanted was quiet."

Luckily, as the music got louder, I was far down the long hall, in my music-charged universe, so very rarely did I hear the exasperated cry, "Turn that thing down!"

November 26, 2007

LISTEN AGAIN
John Lennon's "My Mummy's Dead"

Janet Sarbanes

My mummy's dead
I can't get it through my head
Though it's been so many years
My mummy's dead
I can't explain
So much pain
I could never show it
My mummy's dead

"My Mummy's Dead" appears on *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, John's first solo album after the breakup of the Beatles, and is the fruit of his labor in Primal Therapy at Arthur Janov's Primal Institute here in Los Angeles in 1970. Primal Therapy claims to undo the accumulated effect of emotionally painful events by encouraging patients to relive traumas from early childhood and then scream or cry forth their pain, a process reproduced on the famous track "Mother" from the same album, which culminates with John screaming over and over again "Mama Don't Go, Daddy Come Home!" recalling the pain of his abandonment by both parents when he was 5 years old.

But the dirge-like "My Mummy's Dead," inspired by the death of his mother Julia, who came back into John's life when he was 13 only to be killed in a car accident when he was 17, suggests in its curiously fatalistic tone that John was skeptical about the possibility of purging psychic pain on a purely individual level. "My mummy's dead, I can't get it through my head" seems to indicate an existential condition rather than the starting point for a personal recovery. And indeed, in his intro to "Mother" at Madison Square Garden in 1972, John said, "A lot of people thought [this song] was just about my parents, but it's about 99% of the parents, alive or half-dead."

Is John's song about the loss of his mother, then, a song about the loss of 99% of our mothers, which is to say, a song about the loss of *the* Mother in patriarchal culture? Can this statement transport us from the realm of rock star bio to the psychoanalytic terrain of Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva? In the interest of time, I'm going to say yes. For wasn't the problem with John the very fact—not that his mummy was dead, but that he couldn't get it through his head?

John's refusal to accept that the renunciation of desire for the Mother is necessary to enter into the social order is perhaps the key aspect of his transformative power as a cultural figure. It is perhaps the key to Beatlemania as well, which bears many similarities to the archetypal revolt described in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, where a band of brothers overcomes the omnipotent father and frees up the women under his control for redistribution (those screaming teenage girls), designating an animal totem (in this case, the Beetle) to watch over the clan in his place and ultimately reinstituting the incest taboo to assuage their guilt.

That John would then turn his back on the Beatles once order had been restored and take up with that Phallic Mother, Yoko Ono, is, as we have seen, more than one society could bear. By insisting on and indeed tirelessly promoting her identity as artist/mother, Yoko posed a grave threat to a patriarchal symbolic order that aligns culture with the Father, or alternatively, with the Brothers who usurp the Father—so yes, Yoko really did break up the Band! And John's veneration of Yoko compounded the fracture: "I always had this dream of meeting an artist woman that I would fall in love with," he said. "And when we met and were talking, I realized that she knew everything I knew, and more probably. And it was coming out of a woman's head. It just sort of bowled me over… To find something you could go and get pissed with, and to have exactly the same relationship with any mate in Liverpool you'd ever had, but also you could go to bed with it, and it could stroke your head when you felt tired or sick or depressed. Could also be a mother …"[1]

John's odd formulation of Yoko as beyond gender, the Undead Mother, an "It" not a "She" or a "He," reveals the transformative social potential of the position he sought to occupy with her, a position on the cusp of the symbolic order with access to what Julia Kristeva calls the *semiotic*, which she describes as a "more archaic dimension of language having to do with rhythm, tone, color, with all that which does not simply serve for representation …[the language of poetry and song] which is linked to the bodily contact with the mother before the paternal order of language comes to separate subject from mother."[2] "My Mummy's Dead," with its simple lyrics, use of repetition and Three Blind Mice melody, returns us to that moment of maternal cancellation when we took up the paternal order of language, or so-called proper speech, and "though it's been so many years," rekindles our resistance.

[1] Albert Goldman, *The Lives of John Lennon* (Chicago: Bantam Books, 1988), 246.

[2] Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1982), 124.

STORY

Jean Smith

Pulling the string on my pink music box—it plays a lullaby for me. My grandmother gave it to me, but now she is dead and I am maybe 5 or 6 and the music box is mine, but my mother won't let me pull the string because she thinks I will pull it too hard or too far and break it, but it's mine. It's mine. It's mine. I find it wrapped in tissue paper in a box in my mother's bureau and I pull the string and listen, over and over, watching the string disappear back into the device.

A hi-fi unit known as "the stereo" is the main source of music in the house. A big wooden piece of furniture with wicker speaker covers and a lid that opens like our toy boxes. Inside, the turntable, with its rubber mat, is suspended on springs. Tall dials marked treble, bass and volume—the tone arm with a diamond needle. The stereo is in our Danish modern dining room. My parents turn it up loud so they can listen to jazz while they sit in bed at the other end of the house having "our coffee" every morning.

Sitting on the floor on the dining room, holding LP jackets, looking at the picture of The Little Engine That Could—a train with a silly face—listening to Black Beauty's hooves on the wooden bridge, being irritated by the condescending glee with which Tubby the Tuba introduces the rest of the orchestra.

My grandmother on my mother's side was born in 1880. She was a singing teacher who, in the era of the horse-drawn carriage, went to New York City to sing for men in prison. I remember the piano at the house where my mother grew up. It was the piano my grandmother used to teach singing. An upright, it was set at an angle in the room. A floral curtain across the back hid its wooden construction. I played behind the curtain, looking at how the piano was made, seeing that two long spools built into it were handles to facilitate moving and the piano did in fact get moved to our house once both my grandparents were dead.

The piano was my mother's self-expression and music connected her to her mother. The piano was how my mother ruminated on love. She played dramatic rolling sections, stopping and starting, a series of unrelated parts, as if she was working on a problem, trying to get somewhere by beginning at various entry points. She played most nights and I lay in my bed in the next room, listening. It was frustrating. I wanted her to play a whole piece. Beginning to end. I wasn't sure if she could really play or if she could only do these rolling things that ended before they went anywhere. She didn't like it when people listened, yet

I think she wanted to be heard.

Cross-legged in pyjamas, singing along with The Archies—"Sugar sugar, you are my candy girl"—my brother, two years older, says, "Why do you stick your chin out when you sing?"

I stop singing. I didn't know I was sticking my chin out. I yell at my brother for making me feel self-conscious. I am just singing—I like how it feels—I'm not thinking about how I look. I love to sing in the choir at school, trying to understand the passionate commands my music teacher gives with her face, her shoulders, arms and hands—provoking response.

My father loved to sing—"Would you like to swing on a star, carry moonbeams home in a jar, and be better off than you are, or would you rather be a fish." He fancied himself a bit of a Bing Crosby and at one point in his youth, he'd made a recording—a one-off, straight to whatever it was before vinyl. After much pleading he dug it out and played it for my brother and me. It was funny to hear him singing so officially, like a real singer on a real record and it was strange to hear him being so serious, not like how he sang to us. We laughed—not because he was bad. He sounded great, but I don't think we knew how to say that, so we laughed, nervously. Years later, I asked about the record, could I listen to it again, but he'd thrown it away because we'd laughed.

The Christmas after The Archies, it was Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Willy and the Poor Boys." I don't really know how my father knew this was the perfect record for me. I should ask. The LP jacket shows a guy playing a string on a stick connected to an upside down laundry tub. I made something like this in the yard and to this day, I use the basis of this technique for guitar—grabbing the head and bending the neck to the note I want. On some of my guitars I attach the neck very loosely to the body and play by listening to where I am—listening to where I'm going.

Growing up, we had an acoustic guitar on the wall, hung like a painting, to look at. No one played it. It was an art object. I used to lay it flat on my bed to play it with chopsticks, bouncing them off the strings. I like bouncing and bending and sliding as opposed to hitting, pushing and striking.

In the late '60s, a bearded, bespectacled cousin—a university student—came to our house unexpectedly. Cousin Bruce sat arrogantly in a Danish modern chair— long hair, blue jeans—asking if he could have my grandmother's piano to smash to smithereens with some friends. When my mother reacted negatively, he offered to buy the piano for $100, which made the situation worse. My mother basically had what we called a hairy over this incident.

My brother was given things that ended up in my hands: Hot Wheels track with loops, Levi's cords, Lego, a baseball glove and a quarter inch reel-to-reel tape recorder—a local department store brand. It was warm beige with a hand-held microphone on a spiral cord, like a telephone cord. I taped my guitar experiments and told stories into it, stopping and starting, recording and playing. My mother brought out the tape recorder at Christmas and tried to get everyone assembled to talk into it. She herself spoke in a strangely formal voice as soon as the tape was rolling. The idea was that we'd have the tape to listen to in "the future".

When I was 15, I took guitar lessons for a short amount of time from Alex at the Westview strip-mall, where I later worked at the bakery trying to operate the bread-slicing machine without half the loaf ending up on the floor as I maneuvered it into its plastic bag. Sticky raisin bread was the worst. Westview—where I stood outside the government liquor store asking adults to buy me the white rum that I guzzled in the ravine behind school. Alex had me buy a big Yamaha acoustic guitar for $60 on which I learned "Stairway to Heaven"—the picking part at the beginning. I couldn't get into the strumming part.

On my 16th birthday, after dinner and cake with my family, a friend called to ask if I could go, right then and there, to the Coliseum to see the Doobie Brothers. The Doobie Brothers were a joke to me, but I asked my parents if I could go and I was surprised that I was allowed. A big rock concert, a last minute thing, with this guy—a friend with an extra ticket. He subsequently made himself into a millionaire and here I am, 30 years later, looking out the window at the mountain where we were both ski instructors in our teen years.

In the ski chalet, there was a teen cafeteria where kids clunked around in ski boots, sloshing hot chocolate in styrofoam cups. It was 1973. I was 13 and I'd recently started smoking pot and drinking. "Black Dog" was on the jukebox—a sexy, slippery, echo-y voice sweating and grooving to the way hey-hey mama moved. Outside I kissed a guy named Jim. I rather awkwardly slid towards him, between his skis, and kissed him. It wasn't a very good kiss, this first kiss of mine. I said, "We can do better than that." We kissed again and it seemed the same. I awkwardly unslid myself from Jim, the tails of my skis catching in snow behind me. I guess I hadn't thought about the exiting part.

The first guy I officially "went around with" was Jeff—official because a guy had to ask, "Will you go around with me?" Jeff went to another school and I didn't see him out of ski boots until the ski season ended and he came to a dance at my school. Pulling open the gym door, a live band—Blue Goose—was playing "Brown Sugar." I didn't know it was a cover—it was loud and sexy and incredible. My first live rock band experience.

At home I spent a lot of time in front of the fire—slightly drunk and a little high—while my parents sat on the down-filled brown corduroy couch, eating feta cheese and drinking white wine with Oscar Peterson, Thelonious Monk or Bill Evans playing on the stereo.

In general, my parents were excluded from my adventures with music, alcohol and boys unless one of them picked me up to drive me home from somewhere I said I'd been, like an ice rink to watch a hockey game, when really I'd been six blocks away at someone's brother's apartment off Lonsdale listening to Deep Purple, Alice Cooper and Led Zeppelin, smoking cigarettes and huge amounts of pot, drinking white rum straight out of the bottle. I don't know if my parents' preoccupation with themselves made me invisible, but they seemed not to notice that I was loaded, slurring my way through a rough account of a hockey game I hadn't attended. To this day, I'm a Canadian who has never been to a hockey game.

About 15 years ago, I asked my mother for the quarter inch tapes, the little reels that were carefully stored in the box with the tape recorder—my guitar experiments and the Christmas comments made in the house they no longer lived in, the voices of grandparents who were no longer alive. My mother said, "The tape recorder broke, so we threw it out. We couldn't play the tapes so we threw them out too."

**

I work at a gym for women in the wealthiest neighbourhood in Canada, which is next to the district where I grew up. It's my job to talk to the members while they work-out, if they want to talk. Some do, some don't. A woman who doesn't normally talk says, "I've been told you're writing a book about online dating."

"It started out that way," I say. "But it has turned out to be more about deception, and in particular, it's about self-deception."

"I'm writing a book too," she says, jogging on the spot.

"On what?" I ask, happy to return the focus to her.

"About helping families organize and operate more along the lines of how corporations are structured."

"How very interesting," I say, completely appalled at this idea.

"Tell me more about your book," she says, as Abba plays through cheap stereo speakers.

"In my story," I say. "The protagonist, a woman whose career in music has faded, gets a part-time job at a gym for women."

"Oh my god. You're kidding," she says, as she does her stretches. "So this job is just research?"

"No, this job pays my rent," I say. "In the story, the protagonist does some online dating and she sees her interactions with men as a way to evolve through things she hadn't dealt with while she was a rock star."

"A rock star? That's cute."

"The protagonist is on the phone with her mother who is saying that she doesn't know how much more of her husband's terrible temper she can take. The mother is a frail, white-haired lady with osteoporosis. The protagonist's father has been yelling at her. The daughter tells her mother, 'Don't take what he says personally. He gets angry when he's afraid. He's mad at himself for being afraid. He's doing his best. It's too bad that he has never dealt with his temper, but they didn't do that sort of thing back then. You're a tough cookie Mom. Just hang in there and maybe go easy on the criticism.' "

"The protagonist wants to speak to her father and the mother says he's in an awful mood, but the daughter says, 'That's okay, put him on the phone.' The protagonist tells her father, 'You're doing a great job taking care of Mom. Don't be too hard on yourself for getting mad. You're under a lot of stress Dad. Try not to take her comments personally.' "

"The protagonist gets off the phone, with a sense of the distance she has come. The surrounding story shows significant events from her childhood to illuminate why she gets involved with particular men and what she learns as she becomes more aware of these patterns."

"Wow," says the woman, grabbing a fresh white towel out of the antique box beside the changing room. "That's very powerful material."

"May I ask you if your family, when you were growing up, was a healthy functioning family?"

"Oh yes," she responds. "I had a wonderful childhood, so did my husband, and we have two wonderful children and lovely grandchildren. I have a Ph.D. and I have written many articles on corporate leadership and family structure."

"Wow," I say. "So the evidence is in. You know the secret to a happy family."

"Yes," she says. "But my writing is too academic at this point. I need to create some examples. How do you organize your writing, Jean? Do you use a bulletin board or a computer program?"

"Lately I've been reading and recording sections of the book and making short films," I say. "I put the films on YouTube and then on MySpace where my characters have their own pages. I move the films around to organize the linear

trajectory of the book. The films are colour-coded in 10-minute blocks, so I can visually see where I'm putting things and then I listen to parts of the book in relation to other sections. I also turn scenarios from the books into songs, which I memorize, rehearse and record. I perform the songs on tour, night after night, which is a great luxury as a writer—to see how audiences respond to my writing. I have a long history of using music and words to explore, express and evaluate thinking—mine and other people's."

"Oh my god you are so creative," says the woman, picking up her bits and pieces to rush back to her wealthy, well-edited, extremely-busy, excellently-structured corporate family, leaving me with the thought that if I didn't have problems, maybe I wouldn't have anything to sing about and I like singing. My music has always been push and pull, mine vs. theirs, tension and release, comfort and anxiety, a gathering up of possible solutions—escaping from and to.

Maybe I'm a Leo, I'm a Highway Star—big fat tires and everything.

THE PERENNIAL TULL

Erika Anderson

I should have started to wonder if my mom had been a teenage stoner the moment I found out her favorite band was Jethro Tull. With that mystical yet kind of dirty flute, proggy guitar and lecherous lyrics—Jethro Tull is not like Led Zeppelin, which is also mystical and dirty. Led Zeppelin somehow bridged the loadie/square gap, which might have something do to with the Hobbit lyrics. Jethro Tull was strictly for stoners. "Bungle in the Jungle"? Come on! They didn't even have as wide of appeal as the Doors, which I liked to listen to stoned out of my teenage mind two floors below where my parents slept. I used to listen to "The End" on repeat, my mind following every note of Robbie Kreiger's faux-Asian snaky guitar riffs, every syncopated cymbal skip of John Densmore's drumming, and I knew by heart every self-important lyric that fell out of Jim Morrison's smirking mouth. Looking back, my parents must have known that anyone lighting candles in their room, burning incense and listening to "The End" on repeat was smoking tons of shitty pot. But they never busted me for it.

My mom grew up in a very small town in Nebraska not far from Sioux Falls, where I grew up. The town has about 600 people now but maybe it had more in the early '70s, before corporate farming made small time agriculture a slow road to poverty. Tales of her early childhood are filled with cute anecdotes about her and her siblings dressing the cat up like a baby and pretending to eat mud pies and whatever other wholesome and zany things kids get up to in small towns. However, the stories kind of trail off during her teenage years—so I've had to fill them in with stock footage of butterfly necklaces, oversized headphones and joints smoked on gravel roads. Rural '70s midwest was a place far removed from the hippie movement, yet a perusal of her surprisingly large record collection later turned up not only Tull, but also heavy jams from such psych-masters as Deep Purple, Pink Floyd (of course) and even Alice Cooper.

Despite her groovy and far-out record collection, she went to a nice respectable college right after high school, and when she was done with that went straight into med school. She had two kids right along with her boards and residency and even (briefly) convinced my dad that he should become a lawyer. She is now vice president of her group, is totally on top of her shit and never smokes any pot (that I know of).

When I was 17, she convinced me that perhaps on the off-chance that the world didn't end on Y2K, I might want to consider college. (My contingency plan

had been taking somewhere between one to five years off, working at a shitty Irish/Mexican chain restaurant in Sioux Falls, and smoking lots more pot.) What followed were four confusing years outside of L.A. stiflingly surrounded by terrible hippies. Since then, she'll often start conversations with, "So, have you thought any more about grad school?", to which I usually reply with mumbled deferrals.

While I was home over the holidays my mom proudly announced that my sister was planning to go to med school. I winced inwardly, thinking about my shabby room in West Oakland, and the tiny, scattered paychecks I got from substitute teaching that barely covered rent, my cell phone bill and the steady diet of beans and kale I subsisted on.

Whatever financial stability I was able to nail down was always thrown into chaos by going on month-long tours across the country or across the sea. I would try to impress my mom when she called by telling her about the occasional expenses-paid hotel room at a festival or small time record offers or tiny blurbs in mainstream newspapers. "So are you making any money?" she would invariably ask, and the whole "band thing" would be exposed for what it was: childish, indulgent and financially doomed.

Whenever I asked her about it she'd always insist, "Of course we're proud of you honey! We just don't really understand what it all means." And what meaning could be assigned to underground mp3 blogs, indie record deals with no advances, DIY tours and CD-R comps? Even when I tried to explain it to myself I often ended up in a shrug.

After our house burned down in a South Dakota thunderstorm, my parents redid the basement with a pool table, a dart board and a new stereo system with a record player. My mom likes to go down there after work, crack open a Miller Lite, shoot pool and listen to old LPs: Neil Young, the Rolling Stones, Led Zep and of course the perennial Tull.

Listening to those records growing up, did my mom ever dream of being in a rock band? Or was being a small town girl from Nebraska who played clarinet and sang in church simply too far removed from that for her to even consider it? Perhaps if she would have had blogs and DIY tours things would have been different. But I had to wonder: did she ever, just for a second, dream of getting up onstage in front of tons of people and rocking her clarinet like Ian Anderson rocked his flute?

I like to think maybe so.

WRITE SOON AND TELL ALL
Pauline and Edith Oliveros

Shaila Dewan

"I do miss you, but I am not unhappy that you are gone."

Edith Oliveros wrote those words to her 20-year-old daughter, Pauline, in 1952. Pauline had left Houston for San Francisco, driving with a family friend nicknamed "the Robin." The Robin was a female-to-male transsexual; Pauline was an aspiring composer with a head full of sounds no one then would have considered musical. Presumably, San Francisco at the dawn of the Beat era promised greener pastures for both. Presumably, most mothers would have been beside themselves.

At first, Edith was too. The night Pauline left, she lashed out at her daughter and accused the Robin of taking Pauline away. When Pauline returned that night, briefly, to make peace, Edith was crying inconsolably. Pauline, born when Edith was 17, was the person Edith loved best. And she was leaving.

But a month later, Edith wrote apologetically to her daughter. "I know that you are having an experience you will never forget. And, just as I found at your birth, a mother must endure some physical pain and mental anguish in order to have something big and worthwhile in which to exult."

Pauline's odyssey would ultimately pay off in a way Edith, a self-described "old-fashioned piano teacher," could hardly have imagined. Pauline became a world-renowned composer and perhaps the only avant-garde music maker whose chosen instrument is the accordion (equipped, naturally, with four digital delay processors). In the course of her career, she asked marathon runners with noisemakers on their belts to jog the perimeters of giant mandalas. She conducted a "Sonic Meditation" for 7,500 women at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. She bounced radio waves of her voice off the moon in an attempt to become a "vocal astronaut." She records in wells and underground cisterns, broadcasts live Internet "distance concerts" with musicians on different continents, jams with DJ Spooky and retreats annually to a remote mountaintop in New Mexico to teach "Deep Listening," her meditative approach to hearing everything, all the time.

As one of the few established female composers, Pauline made waves with a *New York Times* editorial, "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers," in 1970. She corresponded with Jill Johnston, Judy Chicago, Kate Millet and other leading feminist writers and artists. She came out as a lesbian in 1971, beginning

an article about her music with "Pauline Oliveros is a two legged human being, a female, lesbian, musician, composer among other things which contribute to her identity."

But back in 1952, Pauline was just a kid who needed to get out of town. Still, she was determined to stay connected to her mother. Their letters were written with feverish frequency, Pauline at first swiping envelopes from the gas and electric company where she worked her day job, later scribbling on the back of handouts for her women's music ensemble. Edith wrote in the wee hours of the night, folding her plain white stationery like a book. When the only blank paper she could find to write on was printed with pink flowers, she begged Pauline's forgiveness for the "trooly-drooly note cards" or the "panty-waist stationery."

They soon found that writing was more than a way to keep in touch. It offered a whole new kind of intimacy, particularly for Edith, who was less comfortable conversing face-to-face. "In one of my letters to you," Pauline wrote in 1952, "I said that I felt like we would grow closer in being apart, and now more than ever I feel that it is true—I actually feel like I know you much better—and the more I do the more I love you."

Their correspondence, which is now archived at the Houston Public Library, spanned three decades, and if its path were traced out it would look like one of those airline maps with Houston as the hub, emanating slender lines first to California, then New York, Toronto, New Hampshire, Holland, Germany, Paris—all the strange new places that summoned Pauline in the course of her career.

The letters unspool a colorful history of two extraordinary women; of Toni waves and tubeless tires; of the Houston music world, where boogie-woogie king Peck Kelley turned down a recording contract because he wouldn't leave his mother, and the international avant-garde music world where the players Pauline performed with experimented by using living tropical fish as the notes of their scores. Yet at their heart, the letters tell the story of a mother and a daughter whose closeness grew despite—or perhaps because of—their distance. The key was that Edith wanted to know the details of Pauline's life, even if those details would sometimes prove painful. "Write soon," Edith would admonish Pauline in closing, "and TELL ALL!!" And she meant it.

Pauline didn't leave Houston because she didn't like it. It was more that her creative impulses pulled her further afield, in search of something new—even if she wasn't quite sure what.

She had always been surrounded by classical music. She, Edith and Pauline's younger brother, Johnny, lived with Edith's mother, whom Pauline called Dudda.

(At 15, Edith had secretly married Pauline's father and dropped out of high school. In 1942, the two divorced.)

Dudda taught piano at home, and Edith ran the nearby Greenbriar Music Studios with Patricio Gutierrez, whom she married in 1955. Eighteen years Edith's senior, Pat was a legendary Houston pianist. He, his father and his brother had all played in the Houston Symphony's first season. At 18, he had astonished symphony audiences with his performance of Mendelssohn's *G-minor concerto*.

Much to Edith's puzzlement, Pauline wasn't as interested in traditional harmony, melody and counterpoint as she was in the esoteric qualities of sound. Her accordion teacher, the renowned Willard Palmer, taught her to hear combination tones, very low undertones which sound faintly when two notes are played loudly. Fascinated, Pauline immediately wanted to eliminate the fundamental tones so she could hear only the undertones. More than a decade later, she figured out how to do exactly that, using signal generators in an electronic studio. "I felt like a witch capturing sounds from another realm," she later said.

She fell easily into the experimental atmosphere of San Francisco, a world Edith knew nothing about. Pauline played at the hungry i and hung out at the Purple Onion, the legendary gathering places of beat-era writers and musicians. She studied Gregorian chant, saw a Russian Orthodox choir and discovered "opera bars," where vocal students could practice their arias. In the apartment she and the Robin briefly shared, he painted the kitchen entirely black and the cabinet doors different primary colors and hung burlap curtains in the windows. (Edith once sent Pauline a valentine that had a picture of a turtlenecked beatnik lass on the front. "Valentines are ludicrous symbols of a bourgeois society!" the card's cover preached. Inside, it read, "So where the hell is mine?")

Salted with surprisingly raunchy humor, Edith's letters read almost as a *roman à clef* of Houston's music scene. She evaluated the symphony's conductors (on both artistic and social merit), sent annotated concert programs and gossiped about musicians (including the real reasons for their shotgun weddings). In 1954 she accompanied a chorale concert in Hermann Park in celebration of "M-Day," the birthday of Houston's millionth citizen. The conductor, she wrote, waved a cocktail (vermouth, benedictine and lemon over ice) instead of a baton.

Immersed as she was in new experiences, finding a letter from home in the mail always made Pauline's heart beat a little faster. Edith dished up slice after slice of everyday life, describing the feline harem maintained by "Grandpa" (the family cat), the latest car wreck of Pauline's calamity-prone brother or the household's precarious finances. Edith once complained that her total assets

boiled down to "five pianos, ten dogs and $1 in pennies!" The teenage Johnnie proved to be a heartache, getting into "girl trouble, car trouble, double-trouble and just trouble. I'll settle for an all-girl family."

Edith was the queen of postscripts and marginal scribbles, filling her letters with limericks and jingles, occasionally even drawing staves and writing out tunes. She often mentioned Mabel, the piano pupil who never failed to bring a bottle of bourbon or scotch to her lesson. When Mabel was in the hospital for a hysterectomy, Edith penned "Posies for a Patient" by I.M.A. Yunowhat: "So, in the bottom of my purse, / I found one lonely nickel. / Not enough for posies, then / But why not one dill pickle? / Symbolical, 'tis sent to make / you smile and leave you tickled / Remembering the times when you / And I've been slightly pickled!" Pauline, of course, was treated to a copy.

Edith clucked over Pauline's troubles more than Pauline herself did, and frequently tried to lure her back to Houston for extended visits (one of her favorite arguments was that Houston was getting so "avant-garde" Pauline wouldn't recognize it). But when she became too much of a mother hen, she would scrawl an emphatic, self-mocking "PER-CAWW!" And when she caught herself lecturing, she would refer to herself satirically as "Mother," adding lots of curlicues and scrolls to the word to make it the written equivalent of a smirky faux-British accent.

Pauline was studying composition at San Francisco State College, where she found a mentor in Robert Erickson. Erickson, who studied with Austrian-born composer Ernst Krenek, was pretty avant-garde himself, but he recognized Pauline's urge to venture even further afield, and he encouraged compositions such as "Spider Song," written with verse by seminal North Beach poet Robert Duncan, a friend of Pauline's. That led to works such as "Trio for Flute, Piano and Page Turner" (upon hearing that title, Edith joked that finally there was a part in one of Pauline's scores she could play). Years later, Erickson even hired Pauline to develop the graduate program in electronic music at the University of California at San Diego, though she herself had no advanced degrees.

On Pauline's visits home from San Francisco, she would sometimes work on her compositions, so Edith knew early on that what her daughter was doing was different. "She didn't know what I was up to, or where it was coming from," Pauline says. Although Pauline tried to explain, she adds, "Explanations don't do it. She's a musician who comes right out of the heart. And if it's not in her heart, she just has to expand until it is."

In 1957, the year Pauline graduated, three of her compositions were to be performed. They sounded so far-out that when Pauline heard them emanating from the practice hall, she wondered who the composer was. At the same time,

Edith was playing with a quartet at the Edgewood Club (a nightspot she called the "Edgewood Den of Iniquity") where her job was to keep the crowd entertained. "We just *love* to play *anything* and can put our hearts into 'San Antonio Rose' with as much enthusiasm as if we were doing a knocked-out jazz arrangement," she wrote.

In 1958 Pauline noticed something that would forever change the shape of her work. She put a microphone in her window and hit record. When she played the tape back, she was surprised to discover how many sounds were on it that she didn't remember hearing. The experience planted the seed of what Pauline later called Deep Listening.

"From that moment, I determined that I must expand my awareness of the entire sound field," she later wrote. "I gave myself the seeming impossible task of listening to everything, all the time."

The following year, her career took off. She composed the music for a critically acclaimed production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*, which traveled from San Francisco to New York. "There are many pitfalls ahead and I am trying to realize it but for now I am going to enjoy the fruit and rotten apples be damned," Pauline wrote. She hoped until the last minute that her mother might be able to get away long enough to see the production.

"My heart is full and I think I shall burst if I don't see you soon," Pauline wrote. "Had vision of you at the airport or waiting outside in the cold." She learned later that Edith had been forced to cancel her flight when Dudda's health had taken a turn for the worse.

In 1961 Pauline and several other composers (among them Morton Subotnick and Terry Riley) started the pioneering San Francisco Tape Music Center, which became a center of artistic activity in the city, eventually sharing a building with the Pacifica radio station, a dance troupe and artists who rented space. Pauline's work began to show a theatrical flair—in "Pieces of Eight," for example, the conductor gave a downbeat and left the podium, spending the rest of the performance noisily dismantling a crate behind the musicians. At the end of the piece, a giant bust of Beethoven with flashing red eyes emerged from the crate and was carried around the audience.

Pauline's work was regularly praised by San Francisco's critics, who singled her out as the best of the experimental composers. "I feel now a pretty crucial time in my life," she confided in Edith. "As an artist I've been acknowledged publicly as one from which to expect a great deal. Anyway, I feel a moral responsibility to be true to myself which is the most difficult task of all! In this society it's very hard on one to be superior and know it (and very lonely)."

In 1962 she was invited to Holland to participate in the Gaudeamus Competition for young composers. Before she went, she taught at a summer music festival in New Hampshire. The audience and students were not familiar with experimental music, and Pauline grew discouraged when one of her pieces got a lukewarm response.

"It's good to have your composition programmed, even though you might feel that it's reception was not all you hoped for," Edith wrote reassuringly. "Composers throughout the ages have endured this experience, and the music will survive."

Holland proved more rewarding. To Pauline's delight, her piece was performed by a chorus decked out in tuxedos and formal gowns. It won first prize. "The San Francisco group has been heard of everywhere in Europe," she wrote Edith, "but our music is just now being heard."

When a Houston paper published an article on Pauline's award, Edith was quoted saying that her daughter's music would "make Stravinsky look like a tea-sipper!" The paper played it up; underneath Pauline's picture, the caption read, "Pauline Oliveros: Stravinsky's a tea-sipper." Edith sent the clipping to Pauline with a sheepish letter claiming she had been misquoted. "Would like to apologize to Stravinsky and to you," she wrote. "After all, what I really said was, 'she'd make Stravinsky look like a buttercup!'"

Edith may have been bursting with pride, but that had nothing to do with whether or not she understood "new moosic," as Pauline jokingly called it.

"The music has no message to me at all," Edith insists. "I wouldn't be interested in it at all if she wasn't my daughter. I don't like it—some of it. It's just noise. I have CDs of hers sitting in there that have never been opened and most likely never will be."

Edith remembers when Pauline sent her a reel-to-reel tape of one of her performances. "I was overjoyed to get this tape from my daughter," she says. "There were tears running down my cheeks listening to it. And I was playing it *backward*."

Pauline's music wasn't the only thing Edith wasn't quite getting. When Pauline was about 17, Edith discovered some letters between her daughter and a woman named Suzon. That's when she learned that her daughter was a lesbian—in fact, that's when she learned there was such a *thing* as a lesbian. She fainted dead away. What followed was a confrontation of disastrous proportions.

The feeling that she was hurting her mother and grandmother was part of what drove Pauline from Houston, and Suzon, who had moved to San Francisco,

was one of the reasons Pauline chose to go there. "I have met more *mature* Lesbians here than I knew existed," Suzon wrote to Pauline in January 1952. "Regardless of what the future holds in reference to our personal relationship, I know this is *your* city."

Edith gradually came around, pulled by her desire to be part of her daughter's life. She supported Pauline's relationships to a degree that now seems enlightened. The first time Pauline returned to Houston, in 1954, she brought her lover with her. Jennie, a girl Pauline had known from the softball teams she played on as a teenager, was given a warm welcome, and afterward Edith's letters always included a greeting or verse for her daughter's companion ("There once was a cute gal named Jennie / but boyfriends, she didn't have any").

When Pauline's love life was rough going, Edith sympathized. "You sound very *alone*," she wrote after Pauline and Jennie split up. "However, this is probably just a period in your life when you are going to be rather withdrawn from things and people. All the better, for it will enable you to give out, later—and to have something to give. Right??—If not—BOOM!—so you're a screwball!"

Yet intellectually, Edith still grappled with her daughter's sexual preference. It was, after all, the '50s. She didn't like to ask about it, because she firmly believed that a good relationship with her children depended on a robust respect for their privacy.

"She has said, 'I don't ask any questions.'" Pauline says, "I mean, she says that a lot. There are times when we wish that she would. I wish she would draw me out."

Edith's curiosity won out over her reluctance to intrude. When she was finally ready to broach the subject of Pauline's sexuality, she chose to do it in a letter—even though she had just paid her first and only visit to Pauline in San Francisco. In 1956, shortly after her trip, she wrote that she wanted to understand Pauline's "philosophy":

"I desire to take a constructive interest, rather than a prejudiced attitude. I am profoundly interested in the ultimate outcome of your situation in that I wonder about the effect of it on your work as a composer, as well as a woman. I am also deeply interested in knowing of other cases, but *not* in books or stories. "

Edith suggested that she might simply write out a yes/no questionnaire for Pauline to send back.

"Well, dear—I am apprehensive to know *how* this will appeal to you, but *please*—do not deafen me with *silence*.—All my love, Mama."

Ironically, it took somewhat longer for Pauline to come to terms with Edith's

romantic life. As a teenager, Pauline had become very close to the Robin, who rented a room in the Oliveros house. The Robin was a couple of years older than Pauline, and more sophisticated. He introduced her to Billie Holiday and Pearl Bailey, and in general "opened up a lot of worlds" for Pauline, even before he admitted to her that he was really a woman posing as a man. The Robin had fallen in love with Edith, and his distaste for his rival, Pat, rubbed off on Pauline.

"I can hardly stand to be in the house with him," she wrote Jennie during a visit to Houston in 1955. "He walks very heavily and is clumsy, stays in the bathroom for hours, hawks and spits constantly, and when he eats he smacks and chews with his mouth open. Johnny can't stand him and I don't blame him."

Part of Pauline's frustration came from watching her mother take care of other people, often sacrificing piano practice and social life to do so. "Pat and Johnny don't lift a finger to help her," she complained.

Running the household and studio was just the tip of the iceberg for Edith. In 1955, the same year she and Pat married, Dudda broke her hip and required constant care. Dudda's staunch independence and periods of depression made her a difficult patient, and as her health steadily worsened, Edith often wrote to Pauline of the strain. To complicate matters, Dudda despised Pat because he was Mexican.

"I would love to be able to cheer [Mama] more by taking her out with us," Edith wrote to Pauline, "but always feel I am between two fires with her and Pat, as it would not take a Sherlock Holmes to detect her aversion and antagonism to him. Very often I feel that my only solution is to leave BOTH of them and situate myself alone. I can live with it now, but for how long?"

By 1960 Pauline had a change of heart toward her stepfather. "An ice age has melted into a warm sea," she wrote Edith, enclosing another letter she had written the year before but never mailed:

"In the past few months a whole lot of things, ideas and memories, have begun to make sense to me in a new way. I have wanted to write and tell all!"

"Often when you were afraid for me and saw me led in a detrimental direction you would tell me that such and such a person had a *hold* on me. I've come to realize how true this is. I have blindly followed some of them into blind alleys, admiring and wanting to identify with what I thought was courage, independence, liberty, etc. Dale [the Robin's real name] is one of them."

As Pauline's own career gathered momentum, she could no longer jump when Dale needed her to help him out of his "ridiculous jams." Pauline told Edith that when Dale sensed Pauline was becoming less easy to manipulate, he broke off their relationship. "The last time I saw him he said to me 'shall we call

the whole thing off.' I think it meant let's stop being friends before you get to know me."

With the Robin gone, Pauline realized he'd poisoned her against her stepfather. "The one thing above all I want to clarify now is my feelings toward Pat," Pauline wrote. "I believe with all my heart that he is a good man. This was my own intuition when you first went with him."

Pauline wrote Pat, and it didn't take him long to respond. "Dear Pauline, *Yo te quiero mucho* ....There are so many things I want to tell you. Only thing is my thoughts are in Spanish....I thought you would never write me a letter and give me a chance to tell you how much I admire you."

Pat's admiration didn't change the fact that he didn't particularly "dig" her music. Edith, too, was still grappling with it. "Please try to send me more tapes and scores, anything at all," she wrote. "I want to be able to play them over and over....It is still like a foreign language to me, but bugs me because I want to 'speak' and 'converse.' Help!"

But again Edith's desire to understand conflicted with her reflexive urge to back off.

"A long time ago, I said, 'I don't understand your music,' " Edith recalls. "She looked at me and said, 'I don't understand what it is you don't understand.' "

"And I realized I should never say that to her again. I don't want to make waves."

Yet despite herself, Edith had epiphanies. In 1960, when Richard Nixon told the Houston Press Club that "diversity is the essence of freedom," Edith wrote to Pauline:

"Since my mind turns away from events of world importance—the Cuban situation, the shelling of Formosa, the snubbing of the president, the collapse of the summit meeting, the impatience of integration and the high cost of lamb—I can only think of this profound and basic truth in connection with, and as applied to the work that I do, namely, the rather pathetic act of attempting to teach a straggling handful of children to play the piano."

"...And then it seemed to me, there was even a link between this and your music, which is so completely different in quality. For when I heard the 'sounds' it was as though all that I had ever done or played or been taught, had been through a refining and distilling process and (for me, at least) it is all there in your music!...so that the message of your music must be—Freedom!"

Even when she took refuge in humor, Edith betrayed an instinctive understanding of what Pauline was getting at. When an extra "sewage charge"

suddenly appeared on the family's water bill, for example, Edith suggested, "How about a new composition inspired by our reactions to sewage charges? Sort of an authentic folk-song deal? We could set up tape recorders in public restrooms, outhouses, private residences all over the country and have a complete record of authentic sounds, and think of what a *live* performance would be like!"

As Pauline continued to explore new territory, she abandoned musical notation entirely. Her scores became written instructions for groups of participants. Her "Sonic Meditations," initially developed with a group of women musicians, were widely used. At the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Pauline led her "Tuning Meditation" for the crowd. She instructed everyone to first sing a tone that they heard in their imagination, then listen for someone else's tone and tune to its pitch as exactly as possible. The effect was oceanic, with waves of sound rolling toward the stage.

In 1977 Pauline won a major prize in Bonn, Germany, for a composition called "Bonn Feier." Initially designed for a college campus (the piece ended with a bonfire, so Pauline simply changed the name for the competition), "Bonn Feier" was a large-scale performance piece that involved creating slightly unusual experiences all over the city, the idea being to cast doubt on the difference between the "real" and the staged. With Pauline's instructions, the mayor of Bonn's assistant arranged for, among other things, African drummers to appear at random times, fake mustaches to be handed out to lady shoppers, and schoolchildren to paint mandalas on manhole covers. The piece took place, unannounced, throughout the entire city for a week. Edith accompanied Pauline to Germany and kept a detailed diary of the trip, describing the performance, Pauline's many press interviews and even the meals they ate.

From Bonn, they traveled to Paris for a festival of electronic music, where Pauline played a deeply meditative for a radio broadcast concert. In the diary, Edith wrote a richly imaginative moment-by-moment account of what she heard.

"I begin to get a feeling of forest sounds, somehow," Edith scribbled as Pauline sat barefoot on the stage, cradling her souped-up accordion. "...It is a prism of sound, reminding me of something gliding majestically through space... One wonders what is in her thoughts as she makes these sounds....Is she meditating on the sound itself? The quality, reverberation, inflection, density, the effect of the sound on others, on herself, the enduring quality of the sound... the feeling she gets from making the sounds, the sounds she gets from what she is feeling?"

She doesn't sound befuddled, yet she insists that she just doesn't get it.

"[Understand], that's the theme word of hers," Pauline says. She believes it's a confidence issue: Edith didn't finish high school, so she's convinced she doesn't understand. "The word carries so much weight for her that I would really like to decipher it...She does get it, and she claims she doesn't. But I think it's defensive."

"There's a double message that goes through the whole [correspondence]," Pauline says. "It all hangs on that word, I don't *understand*. It was almost like a mantra. But then, she *would* understand it, by action."

Edith still lives in the little house on Greenbriar that has been her home since the '50s. Because of a hip replacement, she moves slowly these days. She's the proverbial little old lady—except she wears the T-shirt, sneakers and jeans of a 12-year-old. At rest, she still has the shy, brooding look she had in childhood pictures, but she brightens dramatically when she tells stories, mimicking the foreign students who board in her house with a high-pitched, innocent voice.

Edith's stereo table is stacked with Pauline's CDs and cutting-edge music journals with articles about her. Pauline, at 67, travels all over the world to present her electronically enhanced, layered soundscapes. With her lover, a writer named Ione, she co-directs the Pauline Oliveros Foundation. They collaborated on *Njinga the Queen King*, a play about a 16th-century African woman who ruled her country, which was part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave festival in 1993. On the tenth anniversary of Pauline's Deep Listening Band last year, sound artist DJ Spooky sat in as a guest artist.

Though Pauline and Edith don't write anymore—at the end of the '70s the letters petered out, succumbing to the convenience of long-distance calls and e-mail—Edith still follows Pauline's every move.

"Somebody asked me one time—one of those 'yak yak ladies'—'Oh, how do you stand it, being so far away from your daughter?' " Edith makes a face, and then a squawking noise, moving her hand open and shut like a beak.

"And I said, 'Well, we're closer than people who live in the same house.'"

On Edith's coffee table sits a sleek black keyboard—Web TV, installed by Pauline so that Edith could follow the Deep Listening discussion groups on the Internet. But e-mail is not the only new twist in their relationship.

All her life Edith noodled around with lyrics, and she'd invent her own funny, atonal songs for the ballet classes she accompanied. She's the one who gave Pauline the idea to write music.

But Edith never called herself a composer. During the home organ craze of the '60s, she joked to Pauline in one letter that she had "de-composed" a

Hawaiian melodrama for the Hammond Organ Club. "Curse of the U.S.A." featured Good King Hell-Ray-Ser, the Moo-Moo Maidens and—as the villains—IRS agents.

Still, Edith spent the bulk of her energy taking care of others, not on creative projects. She was content to let Pauline be the innovator. When Dudda died in 1974, at the age of 93, Pauline came for the funeral, and afterward Edith wrote her a tender letter. "When I had those recurring dreams as a child, of soaring through the air like a bird, they came true for me, through you. I have always felt that way and so, each time you leave, it is like another flight, another dream coming true."

By that time Pat was already 70, and his health was far from perfect. Edith cared for him until he passed away in 1985, in the same room where Dudda died.

Now, in her "second childhood," Edith finally has time to write more than the odd limerick. Although she still teaches piano, for a time she went to work for the Houston Ballet as a telemarketer, where she befriended University of St. Thomas theater major Yasser Bagersh. Bagersh started a professional children's theater troupe called Express Theatre and decided to do a musical. He asked Edith to compose it.

At first, Edith balked. But Pauline encouraged her, and finally she agreed to try it. She wrote 26 songs and lyrics for *Rumplestiltskin* (which happened to be one of Pauline's favorite childhood stories) and went on to write four more musicals for Express. *Rumplestiltskin* opened in 1992.

The show was a rousing success, and with Pauline there, Edith took a graceful bow. Afterward, Pauline published an article titled "Edith Gutierrez—Emerging Composer" in the *International League of Women Composers Journal*. Wrote Pauline: "Can you imagine attending the first premiere performance of music written by your mother when your own age is 59 and hers is 77?"

It was Pauline's turn to be proud. *Rumplestiltskin* had been performed 71 times, she pointed out in the article—by far more performances than any of her own works had ever received.

BEV COPELAND

Anna Oxygen

My cousin called me on the phone to tell me I should come home for Thanksgiving. She wasn't sure if my grandma would remember me anymore if I made the trip any later. I descend from a matriarch.

Last time I saw my grandma was this summer. We shared bright red lipstick. She talked about her married friends, and the ones who swapped sex partners. She told me to marry the devoted, head over heels man, not the eccentric professor. Concerned that at 29 I was becoming an old maid, she thought I should get on with it. I drove her around her tiny town in Oregon as she pretended to have important tasks to accomplish. We went to her bank three times to check her balance. I watered her flowers over and over under her big oak tree. We went to the store and she made up things she might need: another fresh peach, some bread. I knew it would all end up moldy and uneaten in her apartment. She made me drive by a wild flower bed three times just so she could look at it. "Is it too much to ask to spend the rest of my years under this big oak tree with my feet in a bucket?" She said this as we passed by her old house one more time. She knew the family was trying to get her into a nursing home.

My grandma has OCD. I'm not sure how the details play out. You could paint it as something eerie and romantic. Grey Gardens. Eccentric and joyous. Sometimes disturbing.

I often brought groups of friends to our family cabin near her house and couldn't wait to show her off. She would rendezvous with us anywhere but her own messy surroundings: a friend's house, the Sharis down the street, the Korner Kitchen. She could easily get nine teenagers rolling with laughter with her one-liners. "I have a new boyfriend, but I think he's gay." "Ok honey, this one doesn't have any dirty words in it." She'd proceed to tell jokes with phrases like "did her from behind" or "any ballerina that can lift her leg that high deserves a drink!"

She pulled out treasures from musty cardboard boxes in the middle of restaurants: a beautiful antique dress with mold growing on the bottom, a hat with feathers on it, followed by a feather duster. "The duster is extra feathers for the hat."

Her old house once had a yard strewn with garbage, antiques, and a fully

made bed with beautiful quilts upright in the rain. When her refrigerator broke, she solved the problem by filling her bathtub with ice and putting food in it. When her dryer broke she threw her wet clothes out the back door into the yard to dry. I often think of this when I'm hitting my DVD player when it misbehaves, or shaking my drum machine just the right way until it turns on. Intuitive doctoring passed down the gene pool.

She always makes me sing "Amazing Grace." The context never matters. This summer I took her to church. In the sacred time when you are supposed to pray for people, the pastor passed the microphone around the room while elderly people expressed concern for dying and sick friends, healing relatives, soldiers.

My grandma grabbed the mic and announced how pleased she was that I was visiting her from L.A. Then she declared that I was going to put on a show for everyone in the church. Before I had time to blink she had handed me the wireless mic. The pastor looked at me awkwardly and said "Are you sure she wants to sing Bev?" Such a familiar complex range of emotion washed over me. Yes I wanted to sing. No way. I didn't want to sing. How absurd. Yes, it would make my grandma so happy. We agreed I would sing after the prayer. My singing always brings tears to her eyes.

She used to have the expression "Every momma crow thinks its baby crow is the blackest." I imagine this has something to do with it. Amazing grace.

I've been conditioned to think generational gaps are unsurpassable. Difference carved into years and words into differences.

Two days later "Amazing Grace" happened again. My visit corresponded with the local nursing home talent show, and I thought it might be a good way to ease her into the community, show her that perhaps it wouldn't be such a bad place for her to live after all. I would be the family hero that moved her where she needed to be, got through to her when no one else could. She always loves a good show.

I pulled up to the nursing home with my forever grandma. Other forever elders lined the entryway with wheel chairs and walkers, grumpy and joyful wrinkled faces. "See, look at all of them, waiting around outside for someone to come visit them," she said. She hobbled out of the car and I watched her belabored walk towards the entryway.

I watched her procession from the car as she nodded side to side to the other elders lining the walkway. She greeted them as if she was going to a big party, and these were the other partygoers. She will always be the life of the party.

I started crying as it occurred to me how brave she is. Our dimensions collapsed and she was walking into her first day of kindergarten, her first day at a new job, her first day at the new church social. It occurred to me my forever grandma was not only just like me, but would at some point stop being forever.

We eventually seated ourselves for the talent show. She perked up as older ladies sang versions of gospel songs. She rolled her eyes as an old man showed off his model ship.

She passed notes back to the lady behind her asking for her phone number. She whispered how much better she would be at organizing such an event, and the next time it happens, she would absolutely be the MC. Then she made sure I was given a talent show number. Before I knew it I was in front of a crowd of ancients and sickly singing "Amazing Grace" again.

joanbaez
brother
da
sarahvaugha
mothe
donovan
petese
terryriley
yoko
son
stravinsk
joaquinsabina
birthdayp
ramones
john
theloniousmon
hendrix
grandmother
sarahvau
abba
aliceco

WORDS FOLLOW LINES CAN EXPLODE

Liz Alibi

I want to pause again to smoke. My cigarettes have already begun to call me more strongly than my words can. Words are weak it is only in sheer numbers that they can break through my borders. Or more artfully, a well-placed word is like a bomb and this I respect most of all, the power of simplicity, the impact that can exist within a subtle gesture.

Missing my bus and watching Julio's bags for him so he can go call his aunt and find his cousin. He comes back a couple of hours later. No, I say, I don't have anywhere to be. Julio and Daniel are cousins. Somos gays Julio says later. Yeah, I caught that, I say. Sergio is Daniel's boyfriend. There is Guillermo, and then Gordito, whose mom has made us a cake.

We stand and eat. Families have brought their tables out into the street and are eating. We stand inside with our drinks and the jokes are coming fast and I am reeling in and out of the flow of conversation. Sergio hands me his cell phone. There is a picture of a pair of legs in stilettos. Better than mine I say and everybody laughs and we eat the cake.

The music is loud and mostly bad. Later we will walk to Daniel and Sergio's place and Julio will dance unbelievably in Sergio's black stilettos, will dance the salsa better than I have ever seen. Salsa, Cumbia, Merengue—the music is great now and I want to dance all night. Then music like Abba, to which Julio and Daniel are performing intricate choreographed moves while we sit and whistle and clap.

Guillermo wants to learn English. Yeah, it is important. One line, one border, one word, we are standing on it practicing and the conversation turns toward the ugliness of English, the utilitarian ploddingness of it, the mismatched and clunky phonemes that never want to flow. In Spanish it seems there are many more colors with which to draw. We agree. And we step back into it, me slowly and he with ease, talking about language, about literature and poetry, Borges to Joaquin Sabina, our lives and our families, about our prospects for living, about violence, about decisions we are both trying to make, about how the world is changing and how to survive. You are here. And I am over here. And neither of us needs a map to see it. More lines.

Gordito goes home. Daniel falls asleep. I say my goodbyes to Julio and Sergio. Guillermo has to work in an hour, and I will catch my bus, so we hail a

cab into the city. I wait while he changes at his place, coming out in his uniform with blaring white shoes. The city is quiet. Except for some birds that sound like a filter sweep on a synthesizer, the city is absolutely quiet.

And with music too. There is the note that comes out of silence, that plays itself and we are all stunned by the impact of the explosion, by the stab and the charge in the air, because the note comes out of itself like one big fucking wail and it is not anybody but itself, wailing some violence we know we have done, or are doing, and still nobody is at fault and nobody can take credit for this kind of sounding. Little by little these words, these sounds and bombs, there is this desire to pare them down to a gentle sliver, not to degrade their impact but to change the delivery of it, so that it comes out rippling now, with the same force but with a sheen that makes us shudder, cuts through us like the wind on water and we are there treading in it, surrounded by it, unraveling the lines so that we can breathe it in. Saying gently, very gently. Even more gently still.

HEAD OF ELECTRONS

Matthew Wascovich

maiden merely british business
fidelity destructor end time
forced to quit at the shoreline
what did we do before this?

expect our ocean
now that you
squint eyes, look made
made weary of you

weary of you and your laws
cleveland aged punker
caught in a personal prison
sound archive sibilating me

singular hour writer
listen to this thought atlas
dramatic figure snaps arm
her card is well, a coma organ

an apostle is getting sick
at the rowley inn, i'm pissed
everyone is sweating
the crush of disagreement

i heard screams from the block:
the maim is of new angle
i had a bullet stuck
but i could not hate myself
i was a head of electrons

ner
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MUSIC AND FAMILY

The First an Experience of Adolescence, The Second of Fatherhood

Kevin Mattson

I was a punk rocker. I was also an only child of a divorced mother. It could be tough, especially with hormones racing around in my body, anger at my father, and a general dislike of all things *high school*. Adolescence was the pits, as it usually is for kids like me. I searched for transcendent experiences—for things that took me out of my world and elevated me to something different. I found that experience in a series of attempts during adolescence—acting, drawing, bad poetry writing, swimming…

And Music. That helped in this search. I played in various bands. I rented a four-track recorder and put together my own tapes and had them sold through grungy punk rock magazines. And, of course, I listened to music, mostly what was referred to as "post-punk" stuff like Birthday Party and Theater of Hate. I could close my eyes, slap on headphones and find myself in a different place.

I also remember playing music with my mom. She played the piano. I played a banged up classical guitar passed down from some family member. And sometimes we would just sit together and play songs out of old music books she had since she had been a kid. I remember playing off one another's melodies and how my chords allowed her a base off of which she could improvise. I remember that the pace of the music somehow worked to hold our rather small family together, and sometimes even get me to that transcendent space I was after.

Today, I find myself with a kid who's 9 and a wife who has decided to take up the piano late in life. My kid also plays the piano but prefers, as should be expected, the drums. So we get together in my office and I pull out a cheap electric guitar. He runs upstairs to fetch an African drum we bought him for his birthday, and my wife grabs the electric piano she practices on. We usually do simple songs, "Like a Rolling Stone" or other simple three-chord progression songs. My wife plinks on the piano, not quite sure how to play in key but still managing somehow. And my kid pounds on the drum, creating new beats every time. There seems something primordial about making music together like this. I look over at my kid during these sessions and think I see someone getting into that transcendent space that I dreamed of during my childhood—the trance like beat taking him somewhere else. And I think, at those moments, about family and music—about how improvising and playing off one another is the essence of a family.


grandfather
sexpistols
doors
ellafitzgerald
father
soulsarmstrong
joanbaez
henryrollins
sister
mother
yokoono
cramps
stravinsky
birthdayparty
daughter
thelonioussmonk
grandmother

COME ON IN
A Conversation About Family

Ian MacKaye with Sharon Cheslow

Sharon is one of the first punk-rockers I got to know back when I first stumbled across this bountiful community of musicians, artists, writers and thinkers back in 1979. It was such an overwhelming discovery for a 17-year-old kid who had all but given up on ever finding a counter-culture! As part of my initial small circle of punk friends, Sharon's energy and enthusiasm played an important role in shaping my definition of 'punk'. I think of it as the free-space, the place in which new ideas are presented, and an environment in which profit doesn't dictate creation. Sharon's commitment to her art and work is an excellent example of that philosophy. In the nearly 30 years that we've known each other we've talked a lot about life, music, art, relationships and everything else. When she approached me about writing something in the theme of 'family', I thought it would make more sense if we approached it as another one of our conversations.

I'm very serious about my families: biological, chosen and extended. It's a huge subject and after reading through the text of our talk, I'm realizing that I still haven't really conveyed just how much my immediate family played a role in my musical world, especially since I repeatedly stress that I was the 'first musician' in the family. On further reflection I think it would be remiss of me if I were not to mention that my older sister, Katie, took me to my first rock concert (Queen and Thin Lizzy in 1976!), and it was with her that I first saw the Ramones in 1979. My other older sister, Susannah, was connected to a crew of kids in D.C. that thrived on mid-'70s funk and dance-music, and I was exposed to an enormous amount of those sounds at her parties. Everything was (and is) a lesson for me, and I can't help but think that every compliment and every insult, every agreement and every quarrel, every pact and every split all nudged me in the direction in which I moved and still move in to this day. Such is music. Such is family.

Due to geographic realities, this conversation had to take place over the phone, but I still found it engaging... I hope you, the reader, will feel the same.

**

Sharon: I remember staying at your grandparents' house in Connecticut, with a bunch of our friends, around 15 years ago, and it was the first time I realized your grandparents had been writers. Was that your father's parents' house or your mother's parents' house?

Ian: The house you stayed in was in Guilford, Connecticut, and that house belonged to my father's parents. My father's father, Mac MacKaye, was a newspaper man. He also wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* and wrote a couple of novels. He was a true crime guy in the '20s. My grandmother, Dorothy MacKaye—whose pen name was Dorothy Cameron Disney during the '20s and early '30s—was a somewhat successful mystery writer. She did about 10 or 12 books, published in a number of countries. She was actually considered quite successful. They were living in New York at the time and were tangentially connected to the Algonquin Round Table scene. So they knew a lot of writers in New York at the time.

S: Can you talk about that for people who aren't familiar with it?

I: The Algonquin was a hotel in New York and there was a restaurant in the hotel where a lot of writers [gathered], like Dorothy Parker. Basically it was a writers' scene and they would get together and have lunch and fire off of each other. It became quite famous in literary circles, as a kind of energy source for a lot of writers. I think my grandparents were connected to that. Like a lot of writers in New York, they wanted to get a summer place. So they got this place in Guilford, Connecticut, which is about two hours from New York. Basically everyone would, on the weekends, jump on the train and go up to the country house. They would basically all go there and drink. (laughs)

S: I remember seeing newspaper articles about them in that house. Was the community they lived in part of an artists' colony in Connecticut?

I: It was, actually. Guilford, at that time, was where a lot of the New York artist people relocated. There were a number of writers there, a lot of artists and art collectors. They were all going out there and buying farms and that was their hang. My picture of them is that they were all getting together and playing charades.

S: (laughs)

I: We found photos of them in the '30s doing hijinks—goofing off and running around. It was a lot like any one of our punk hangs. They were young and really living. My grandmother said she always tried to keep her nose to

her work. But she said my grandfather and his friends would always try to get her to come out and play. She was really a dedicated writer. She talked about how they would come and parade around naked to try to distract her. But she refused to take a bite at the bait.

Then during World War II, my grandfather went over to England. He was involved with propaganda stuff during the war. And my grandmother ended up going over as a correspondent for, I think, the *Ladies' Home Journal*. She traveled through the front lines. She was in Italy and in the stew, so to speak. And they moved down to Washington because that's where the work was. Although my grandmother, among the many colleges she went to—she never graduated—went to George Washington University in the late teens or early '20s.

S: Where had your grandfather gone?

I: I think he went to University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. I'm not positive about that.

S: So they were both journalists and writers in Washington, D.C. after New York?

I: Pretty much. They moved to Washington, but they maintained their place in Connecticut. They moved around. They'd go to New York for a while. My grandfather went to Hollywood at one point. A lot of writers were getting work out there doing screenplays. And then my grandmother ended up in the late '50s as one of the co-founders of this column "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" I think it's generally thought of as the first advice column.

S: Before Ann Landers?

I: Yeah. The structure of that column was that my grandmother would interview couples who were having marital problems, each of them separately and then together. Then she would tell a counselor or therapist and lay it out for him. The doctor was always a "he" at the time. He would pronounce what they needed to do. The truth is, that was a bit of a literary illusion. In fact, what had really happened is that these couples had problems and they'd gone to a particular counseling institute. It was a rather new form of therapy. The idea of marriage counseling was kind of radical in the '50s. These were people who had already gone through counseling, and almost always their marriages stayed together. And then if there was an interesting story, the institute had my grandmother write it up and then change the tense [to the past]. What's very interesting about this is that she did it for almost close to 25 years. She did it until the late '70s. By the time that cassettes came along,

she started to tape them. And for the last two years, I've been driving back and forth to work listening to people in the 1970s discuss their marriages.

S: That's amazing (laughs). How old were you when you became aware that your grandparents had this history?

I: I always knew. My father was a newspaper man. My mother's father was a newspaper man. He worked for the *Washington Herald Tribune*—he was a sports writer. My mother's mother was an English teacher. My mother helped edit the poetry corner in *Ladies' Home Journal* for a while. She wrote all the time. My mother kept journals from the time she was 6 until she died. When she died, she left us a filing cabinet of her entire life. She typed it all up and even edited it, which means she took out some of the, I think, less attractive aspects. (laughs) I remember when she edited it and I said to her, "That doesn't seem fair. You're taking out stuff." And she goes, "It's my journal! I can decide what I want people to read and not you." And then she goes, "You're lucky I'm leaving you anything." I said, "I can't argue with that." (laughs)

S: So it sounds like because both your parents were writers, it seemed natural to you that both your grandparents would be writers too.

I: Yeah. It just didn't occur to me. I thought everybody was a writer basically.

S: Were both your parents involved with writing from an early age?

I: Yeah. They worked on the Sidwell Friends High School newspaper together. They weren't going out in high school. They were just good friends. My mother went off to college in Chicago—a Catholic school called Rosary—and my father went to Harvard.

S: What did they get their degrees in?

I: That I'm not sure about. I'm quite sure my father's is in Theology because he went into the Episcopal Seminary in New York. They stayed in touch. They wrote to each other. They were very close friends and then they both lived in New York. And at some point, they both needed a place to live and they said, "Why don't we just get married?" (laughs)

S: Are you serious? (laughs)

I: Yeah, basically. They decided that they wanted to get married and have a family.

S: What about music? Were they friends with any musicians or composers?

I: No. I'm the first real musician in the family. Isn't that crazy? I mean my mother

played piano. As a child, she was given a piano. And she kept that piano with her through her entire life. It's still sitting at Beecher Street. And when she was pregnant with me, she played piano a lot. And the theory is that her belly rested against the piano and I just picked up on it. I think I wrote my first song on piano when I was 3. I was just fascinated with sound and music. We had a record player and I remember this one particular record by Floyd Cramer called "Last Date." It was a song I couldn't stop listening to. I would listen to it over and over and over and over again. My parents said I was the first kid who was obsessed with music. My interest was in music and specifically in rock and roll. By the time I was 8 it was 1970. And there were college kids living on Beecher Street—hippie kids who I became friends with. And then I ended up looking through their record collections and thinking, "Wow!" And then, of course, I remember first hearing Jimi Hendrix and my mind being blown.

S: Do you think the fact that so many of your relatives were writers had an effect on your own songwriting?

I: Maybe lyrically. Words are a premium in the MacKaye household. Everybody has done something in their lives where words have played a role. Katie is a poet. Susannah is a linguist. Alec is studying English and he also wrote songs. Amanda wrote lyrics and has done a lot of writing. Words are just serious in that household. I started writing poetry at a very young age. I have poems that I wrote when I was 5.

S: Yeah, that's what I was wondering.

I: I always wrote poems. I was fascinated with rhyming. (laughs) It's funny. My mother was pretty good about keeping them all. And I'll occasionally come across an old poem of mine. You know, it's a kid's poem and sometimes it's pretty ridiculous. But it didn't escape me. It's always stayed inside of me.

S: One thing that struck me about you right away, when I met you and heard your lyrics, was that you were very poetic. I really loved that.

I: Thanks. I'm really serious about words. Since my mom died, I've been having trouble getting words out. I suspect—and I don't know this—part of processing the loss of a constant in your life requires, I would say, a temporary patch…something to kind of cover up the wound. And maybe a little sort of spiritual anesthesia. I suspect that part, whatever it is that requires attention, is also part of my creative system. In other words, it's numbed. My mother's death was not a horrible thing for us. In many ways it was an incredible and beautiful experience. That's just the way things happened.

This is just about my experience. I want to be really thoughtful because other people have really different experiences. But in our case, at least—from my perspective—it was an entirely organic experience, and one of the two most important events in anyone's life—the coming and the going. It was not a deep grieving. However, I suspect that part of the way I have contended with this—and I think it's a temporary condition, I hope so—is that it's really affected my writing.

S: It's funny because I remember several times in the past when you've said to me, "I feel creatively blocked. I can't write." I go through those cycles too.

I: The main point is that when I can't write, for whatever reason, it's agonizing for me. That suggests that this word thing is no joke at all. (laughs)

S: What did your grandparents think of your songs?

I: They never came across any of my lyrics really. Dorothy—my father's mother—would have been the only one who was alive. She saw the Teen Idles once. She saw us play at Fred's Inn in Northeast. Do you remember that show? On 12th Street.

S: Yes! (laughs)

I: Yeah, she came to that show. I think The Untouchables and Teen Idles and maybe Black Market Baby played. That place was about four blocks from where my mother grew up. She used to go to that place when she was a kid—it was a different place. I have a tape recording of my mother and my father and my grandmother and Amanda—who was 10 at that time—at the show, and then they leave talking about the show. It's so great. They leave while we're playing. They're walking down 12th Street and you can hear "Get Up and Go" echoing down the street. It's so beautiful sounding. But my grandmother says at one point, "Well, that was certainly fast and very loud. I wonder if they've every thought about the fact that if they were to play a little bit slower and quieter now and then, it would make it faster and louder." And that was something I actually really took to heart in my later bands. (laughs) Dorothy really looked upon my music stuff with a jaundiced eye. She was definitely a little bit cynical about it. In 1980—as you probably remember—the Teen Idles set out for Los Angeles and San Francisco.

S: Yeah.

I: We'd never toured outside Washington, D.C. at that point. It was our first tour. And the way we did it—and this is for the benefit of the readers, of course—

we just bought tickets for the Greyhound bus. We took a bass and a guitar and a pair of drumsticks. We had two roadies, which is funny when you think about it since there wasn't anything to carry.

S: I forget—who were the roadies? Mark Sullivan and who else?
I: Henry Rollins!

S: How could I forget that?! (laughs)
I: I don't know! So then we made our way across the country and we got to the L.A. Greyhound Station. And I had one contact number—it was this woman named Rosetta. I met her when X played at the 9:30 Club and she was someone from L.A. I remember I said to Exene, "We're going to play in L.A.," and Exene goes, "I'm sorry about that" or "I feel sorry for you." And then I was like, "Huh?" But Rosetta was nice. Rosetta was like, "If you need a place to stay, you should give me a call." I was like, "Okay, great." We definitely needed a place to stay. So we got there and we called, and it was disconnected. I suddenly realized, Plan B. But there was no Plan B. I had not even thought about it. (laughs) I was like, "Uh, oh."

I had no idea what to do. It occurred to me that my great-uncle Stanley, who was Dorothy's brother, lived in Pasadena. He was a playwright, and so I called my dad and explained the situation and he gave me Stanley's number. I called up Uncle Stanley and I go, "Hey Uncle Stanley, it's Ian!" (laughs) And he's like, "Hi?" It wasn't like we were close or anything. I go, "I'm here with five friends and we need a place to stay for about ten days." (laughs)

S: (laughs)
I: The thing about it is that he was such a good dude. He and his wife had adopted nine kids. They were German refugee kids after the war. They had a big old house in Pasadena. And he came and picked up as many of us that would fit in his car and the others had to take a city bus out there, which is another story altogether. But we ended up staying out there with him and it was really good. We played the show and it was quite an adventure. I think about it now and I think what a super hero he was. At the time it didn't even occur to me.

But in any event, about a month later we were back home and the phone rang. It was my grandmother calling for my father. Dorothy asked for my dad and my dad wasn't home. So then she said, "I want to talk to you about something." I said, "What's up?" She said, "Well, I'm really angry with you about the way you took advantage of Stanley." I said, "We didn't do anything wrong." She said, "Well, he was really upset that you weren't more

professional. You didn't rehearse every day."

S: (laughs)

I: I said to her, "Well Dorothy, we couldn't rehearse every day. We didn't have any equipment." She goes, "Well, if you don't have any equipment, then I guess you're not trying to be really serious about it." I go, "We are serious. But we didn't have any amplifiers." She said, "Well why wouldn't you have amplifiers if you want to be a serious band?" I said, "Because we took a Greyhound bus all the way out to L.A. We had to borrow the equipment." Anyway, she would not let up. She kept pushing to the point where I was screaming, "You don't fucking understand! You don't know what you're talking about." And then my father came in from work at that very moment. He walked in the house and went, "Hello." I threw the phone at him and said, "It's your goddamn mother!" (laughs)

S: This is something I've been thinking about in terms of your family. Somewhere along the way, you must have learned in your family that the daily practice of doing creative work is what life is all about. So much of how you've structured your life is around that idea, of a daily practice of creating while staying connected to your friends and family. And it sounds like maybe you got that from Dorothy.

I: I don't know about that. Maybe. Dorothy was an amazing person. Her discipline and her seriousness about writing—I can't question that. However, I don't think she thought very highly of the music concept at all. She didn't take it seriously. I have all these tapes of her on the telephone, talking with people about me. And it's her talking about, "He's just not serious. He doesn't know what he's doing. Is he ever going to get finished with this little phase?" I expected this much from her. What's more important to note is that my mother and father never questioned it. They never asked "what are you doing?" or "how are you going to make a living from that?". And that's the part of my family that's so absolutely imperative and so incredible. My parents were entirely supportive. It took me years to realize that when people hear that, they think it means my parents gave me money. That is completely not the case. My parents were both like, "Follow your heart. Do what it is you want to do and don't worry about money. Don't let that be a factor."

I think each kid had different dreams about what they wanted to do. My parents were really supportive and I was the music person. I wanted to be a punk rocker. I wanted to make things with you all. My parents never

chided me. They never said, "What a waste of time." In fact, when I was 29 years old, I was cleaning my room here at Dischord House playing Led Zeppelin's first album. There's that song I really love—"Your Time is Gonna Come"—and I started listening to the lyrics, which I don't normally do. I was listening to this song and listening to what he was singing about. He's singing about this woman who's done him wrong, and I was thinking this was such an adult theme. At that point I was in Fugazi, and he seemed more adult. (laughs) But he was 18 at the time he wrote those lyrics. Suddenly I was like, "Wait a minute—I'm 29 years old and I still feel like a kid." (laughs)

I had this existential freak out. So I called my father up and I said to my dad, "Oh my god! I'm freaking out here." He's like, "Why?" I explained to him the situation and he said, "Well if it makes you feel any better, I think of you as a fully grown adult. On the other hand, I don't think of myself as one." (laughs)

S: (laughs)

I: And I was like, "Uh oh." My dad always has this thing like—well, it just gets worse. But I said to him at one point—connected to that—"I wonder if I screwed up. Maybe I should have gone to college." He goes, "Are you crazy? What are you talking about? Look what you've made with your life. Don't be seduced by what society thinks. Think about what you've done. If you're happy with what you've done, then you're good." And I was like, "Okay."

S: That's really amazing, considering he went to Harvard.

I: Yeah, it is.

S: Not many parents who'd graduated Harvard would approve of their children not going to college.

I: That's for damn sure! But I was not going to go to college. I decided I wasn't going to go.

S: I know you have some Quaker roots, but I couldn't remember where they came from. Your father went to Seminary, so how did he end up becoming involved with Quakers?

I: Actually, I have no Quaker roots. My parents went to Sidwell Friends, which was a Quaker school.

S: The reason I'm asking is because I remember you telling me that somewhere in your background you learned about the Quaker tradition of standing up and speaking your thoughts.

I: Right. My mother was a Catholic and my father was an Episcopalian. She converted to Episcopalianism when they got married, but by the time their marriage went wobbly in the early '70s she thought, "To hell with this. I'm not going to go to this church any more." We were like, "Yeah! We're not going either." (laughs) My dad actually still goes. He's majorly involved with that church. But I'd like to stress that St. Stevens Incarnation—which is the church I was baptized in and where he goes to this day—is one of the most progressive liberation theology churches. As a kid, they had rock bands playing there. The priest at the time was almost excommunicated from the church by allowing a woman to say Mass. They had one of the first gay marriages. Stokely Carmichael spoke there. They were involved with the anti-war movement. It was a very radical church.

In any event, both of them were super smart and both had studied religion intensely. So there was a lot of discussion about religion at the table. We talked about all different religions. As a child, I remember going with my father to a Mennonite retreat. But I think I learned about the Quakers largely on my own. I thought they were very interesting. My mother told me quite a bit about them, like consensus and trying to figure out, as a community, how to contend with problems and change, and how you operate as a community. Everyone has to agree on something, so you have to talk about it. If I was talking about standing and talking, that's just my own study. Because I find it really interesting and a potentially productive and moving way for people to establish community, for people to feel comfortable talking in front of each other, you know?

S: Yeah.

I: But I'm not a Quaker. I'm a non-subscriber across the board. (laughs)

S: Given your family background, it sounds like it was focused mostly on writing and not on music.

I: Right. When you told me about your family, I was like, "Woah! How crazy." From my point of view, I couldn't even imagine. Nobody in my family knew anything about music.

S: So I think it's really interesting that you and Alec and Amanda all ended up doing music.

I: Punk saved us. I will say one thing about my family—especially on my father's side—as writers they were snobby. Speaking for myself, when I wrote something I always felt it wasn't good enough. It's just the way they were. I said to my father many years later, "You really made me feel inferior."

He said, "Actually I understand exactly what you're talking about. I think that's exactly what my parents did to me." I felt like as a writer I didn't have a prayer. I didn't have a chance, because I didn't feel supported. I used to write short stories. I actually tried to write a novel as a kid. I started writing a novel called *Knights of the Stone Forest*. It was sort of an S.E. Hinton gang book. Pretty good book, actually, but I only got nine chapters done.

S: (laughs) So maybe music was an avenue for you to more freely express yourself.

I: Right. And also because it was a different form. It was outside of their sphere. They couldn't understand it, and so they couldn't critique it. As I said, my grandmother just thought it was ridiculous. I mean, she didn't say it to my face, but I think she just thought, "This is a waste of time." My mother loved it, but what she really loved was all of us. I'm not talking about the kids, I'm talking about all of us—like when you and Anne [Bonafede] or Nathan [Strejcek] or whoever came by. She just loved us. She loved the punk rockers. She loved our friends and she thought it was amazing what we had done. You can think about it over the years—for 20 some odd years—people were coming through that door at Beecher Street. And when she died, the funeral was enormous. All these people were talking about their relationship with my mother. These were people who were my friends. I had no idea they had a relationship with my mother. But she had connected with many people.

She just thought it was a really important thing. She understood music. She loved music. She loved The Cramps. I took her to see The Cramps and she was so happy.

S: That's one of the fond memories I have of her—she really seemed to be open and accepting and really wanted to support the community of friends that you were developing.

I: Definitely. And not only did she want to, but she did. I mean Henry lived in our house. John Hargedon lived in our house. There was pretty much a revolving door of characters in and out of that house. Of course, it's the Dischord address. So over all these years, people have arrived at 3819 Beecher Street, looking for Dischord House, only to find my mother and her dog. You know Pete Chramiec [ex-Verbal Assault]?

S: Yes.

I: After my mom died, Pete wrote me a letter. It was so beautiful. Pete wrote me that in 1985 he and some friends came to Washington, D.C. They were skateboarding around and decided to try to find Dischord House. And they found

Dischord House. But it wasn't Dischord House. It was my mother's house. So they knocked on the door, and she answered, "Hi!" He asked, "Is this Dischord House?" She said, "No, this is where he gets mail. This is where Ian grew up." And then she said, "Well, come on in." She goes, "I'm on the phone right now. You want a Coke or something?" They were like, "Sure." She sat down in the living room and she was on the phone. He and his friend were just drinking a Coke, and then she came back in. She talked to them for a bit. She said, "Let me try to call Alec." Alec basically gave Pete my number and then I talked to Pete and then we became friends. I [later] recorded Verbal Assault and he did carpentry work for me and now he's building houses in Olympia. So Pete wrote this letter saying, "All your mother had to do was say he's not here and close the door, and maybe none of this would have happened." And I was like, "Wow, that is a testament right there." She said, "Come on in." If there's ever a gift I got from my parents, it's that they said, "Come on in."

CONTRIBUTORS

Liz Alibi

Liz Alibi is a musician whose work spans many genres, including new music, improvisation, electronic composition, Asian folk and pop, noise, minimalist, free jazz and experimental rock. She has played/recorded with Anthony Braxton, Wadada Leo Smith, Cecil Taylor, Porest, Hans Grusel, Neung Phak and with members of Caroliner, Sun City Girls and Rova Saxophone Quartet. She lives in the Bay Area.

Erika Anderson

Erika Anderson is from South Dakota. She is a direct descendent of Erik "Blood Axe," a ruthless Viking warrior. She makes videos, and has sung and yelled and played guitar in Gowns and Amps for Christ, and on her own as Some Dark Holler.

Bill Berkson

Bill Berkson is a poet, critic and teacher who figured prominently in the New York School of the 1960s and was editor and publisher of Big Sky magazine and books in Bolinas, California, in the '70s. He has since taught at the San Francisco Art Institute and contributed regularly to many art magazines and museum catalogues. He was the 2006 Distinguished Mellon Lecturer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. His latest books are *Our Friends Will Pass Among You Silently, Sudden Address*, and an epistolary collaboration with Bernadette Mayer entitled *What's Your Idea of a Good Time?* He now lives in New York and San Francisco.

Sharon Cheslow

Interrobang?! founder Sharon Cheslow is a musician, vocalist, writer and artist based in San Francisco and Los Angeles. She co-founded the pioneering Washington, D.C. band Chalk Circle in the early 1980s and went on to perform, record and exhibit songs, sound collages, sound events and videos with numerous collaborators, most recently under the name Coterie Exchange. Her latest release with Weasel Walter and Liz Allbee is on Curor (UK).

Cynthia Connolly

Cynthia Connolly is a Washington, D.C. based artist and photographer who finds her childhood memories of her home city of Los Angeles a distinct influence on her art and photography. Besides installing her own art in exhibition venues, she booked an alternative club in the '80s in Washington, D.C. called dc space, did advertising and promotion for the punk record label Dischord Records from 1992–2002, and currently directs and curates a gallery in Arlington County. She also publishes postcards and books of her own work.

Shaila Dewan

Shaila Dewan is a Houston native who began her journalism career as a staff writer and art critic for the *Houston Press*. Since joining the staff of the *New York Times* in 2000, she has covered 9/11, the Iraq war, the Virginia Tech shooting, Hurricane Katrina and countless other stories, large and small. She has been a national correspondent, based in Atlanta and covering the South, since 2005.

Alan Licht

Over the past two decades, guitarist Alan Licht has worked with a veritable who's who of the experimental world, from free jazz pioneers (Rashied Ali, Derek Bailey) and electronica wizards (Fennesz, Jim O'Rourke) to veteran Downtown New York composers (John Zorn, Rhys Chatham). Licht is also renowned in the indie rock scene as a bandleader (Run On, Love Child) and supporting player to cult legends like Tom Verlaine and Arthur Lee. His first book, *An Emotional Memoir of Martha Quinn,* was published by Drag City Press in 2003; a second, *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Media*, the first extensive survey of the genre in English, was published by Rizzoli in fall 2007.

Kevin Mattson

Kevin Mattson teaches history at Ohio University and is a fellow at the Center for American Progress. He is author of numerous books, including *Rebels All!: A Short History of the Conservative Mind in Postwar America* and *Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century*.

Ian MacKaye

Ian MacKaye is a musician, singer and songwriter whose numerous bands include The Evens, Fugazi, Embrace, Minor Threat and Teen Idles. As co-founder of Dischord Records and activist within punk, he has been a pivotal force in Washington, D.C. and independent music for almost 30 years. He is featured in numerous books and documentaries, including Jem Cohen's *Instrument*. His latest release is The Evens' *Get Evens*.

Pauline Oliveros

Pauline Oliveros (1932) is one of America's most vital composers. Deep Listening®, her lifetime practice is fundamental to her composing, performing and teaching. She serves as Distinguished Research Professor of Music at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, Darius Milhaud Artist-in-Residence at Mills College, Oakland, CA and president of Deep Listening Institute in Kingston, NY.

Anna Oxygen

Anna Oxygen (aka Anna Huff) performs, sings and makes psychedelic aerobics videos. She has released several albums of electronic music, most recently *This is an Exercise* on Kill Rock Stars. Her solo work has been presented at The Seattle Art Museum, PS1, NYU, The Armory Center for the Arts (Pasadena), The Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, and the Rohsska Museet in Gothenburg, Sweden. She currently resides in Los Angeles and is in the multimedia performance group Cloud Eye Control.

Janet Sarbanes

Janet Sarbanes is the author of the short story collection *Army of One*, (Otis Books/ Seismicity Editions 2008), and is currently completing a novel entitled *This Land: The Adventures of the President's Daughter*. She teaches Narrative Writing and Theory in the CalArts MFA Writing Program, and Cultural Studies in the School of Critical Studies. She has recently published in *Popular Music and Society*, *Utopian Studies*, *Black Clock*, *Afterall*, and the anthologies *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* and the *Noulipan Analects*.

Jean Smith

Jean Smith is the singer in the literary rock duo Mecca Normal and the author of two published novels. She is the co-presenter of a lecture series called *How Art & Music Can Change the World*. Jean lives and writes in a corner room looking out at Vancouver, BC and the mountain where she, long ago, was a ski instructor in a bright red and orange jacket. She could go on. But she won't. Not here.

Matthew Wascovich

Matthew Wascovich lives and dies in Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., playing music with Thee Scarcity of Tanks. He is the author of *We Will Know, Gypsy* (Hab Discontent Books, 2008).

Sara Wintz

Sara Wintz is lead singer of the Pretty Panicks Press and co-publisher of :::The Press Gang:::. Her work has been published in *Shampoo*, *Cricketonlinereview* and *Ecopoetics*. She is from Oakland, California, by way of Los Angeles and New Jersey.

"One of the great things I learned from both my mother and my dad and from some of these folks here is that this kind of wanting to make the world a better place is not something that started with the Weavers. And I learned that from the Weavers! They didn't take the credit for starting anything on their own but they recognized and continued a tradition that's probably been going on for as long as people have been around. And that is a wonderful thing for a person to discover: he or she is not the beginning of a thing but somewhere in the middle of a long line of people who are concerned about making the world a better place to be." - *Arlo Guthrie*

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