Certainly, Stewart did not have to forfeit her fortune when entering Alderson nor should she be denied the right to return to the empire she built. And can she really be faulted for playing the appearance game that is now, sadly, the only measure that matters in U.S. culture. It is easy and ordinary to pick on Stewart.

But, there is much to be considered and learned from her event. Steffen Poorter, chief creative officer for the ad agency Euro RSCG, recently stated in the Chicago Tribune that Stewart’s prison term was like “discovering she has a tattoo...she now has street cred; we like people with flaws.” The media likes celebrities with flaws as it produces a new cycle of feel-good, second-chance, over-the-shoulder, odd-stories angles that we can predictably expect in the coming months. Stewart’s image will be reborn.

For the rest of the female prison population, the stigma of “criminal” and “inmate” will tragically follow and hinder them upon exiting the penitentiary. Their “street cred” will be a near-impossible burden to overcome, consuming many of our fellow citizens and returning nearly two-thirds of them to their home away from home. A quick glance at the numbers should sound familiar. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1977 to 2001, the female prison population increased 502 percent from 12,279 to 85,031. From 1990 to 2000, the annual growth rate for female inmates was 7.6 percent (5.9 percent for male inmates during the same period). Black women are more than twice as likely as Hispanic females and five times more likely than white females to be in prison as of 2002, all of which are predominately in the lowest socio-economic status. There are an additional 350,000 women statewide under court protection. Of the 650,000 women currently under the penal gaze, 85 percent are there for nonviolent drug offenses. Yet, we know that nearly 99 percent of these women will return to society, what awaits them: a demonic rhetoric that follows these women from the walls of prison to the communities of this country.

The female drug user has historically and hysterically been used as a figurative scapegoat to blame for the breakdown of the nuclear family. In 1926, Richardson P. Hobson, renowned temperance advocate and head of the National Woman’s Defense Association, declared at a hearing before the House Committee on Education, “addiction destroys the seat of those very attributes upon which all the institutions of freedom and civilization must rest, and destroys its power of procreation.” Since Harry Anslinger became chief of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in 1930 (the “opium vampire”), to William Bennett’s term as drug czar in the 1980s (the “crack mother”), the politics of perception has consistently constructed a symbolic female drug user as the greatest threat to the United States. So, as millions were spent by the Nixon administration to the billions now spent under the Bush Administration in the modern war on drugs, there has been a corresponding increase in the incarceration of the population. Between 1984 and 1999, the number of defendants charged with a drug offense in U.S. district courts increased almost 3% annually. This continuous growth was accompanied by the opening of over 600 state and 52 federal correctional facilities. Many of these new facilities were needed for the exploding female population, and Corporate America has responded.

As a California Department of Corrections official explained, “there is no seasonal fluctuation, it is a non-polulating industry, and in many circumstances it is virtually invisible...if crime doesn’t pay, punishment certainly does.” For companies like Corrections Corp. and the Geo Group, this booming prison population produces a steady, new customer base. By the end of 2004, Correction Corp. stock was up nearly 75 percent since the beginning of the year and the Geo Group stock increased over 125 percent. “These are good growth stocks and we think the earnings are going to continue to keep growing,” said Don Hodges, president of Hodges Capital Management. But what are the hidden costs? Nearly 70 percent of female inmates at both state and federal prisons have young children according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. This equates to at least 1.3 million children nationwide who have a mother behind bars, states a report by the Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers organization. At the time of imprisonment, nearly half of the women ran single-parent households and their children were sucked into child services upon imprisonment. Although there are now 104 female prison facilities, a 47 percent increase since 1990, the geography of most of the penal facilities leave the inmate population over 100 hundred miles away from their children, extended family, and friends. Thus, we are succeeding in breaking down certain nuclear families. And with their family unraveling on the outside, life inside provides no relief.

In 2000, a report by Amnesty International concluded that U.S. correctional “authorities [at least] failed to protect women from sexual misconduct by correctional officers and other staff: the misconduct included rape, sexual relationships, sexual touching and fondling, and without good reason, frequent, prolonged, close-up and prurient viewing during dressing, showering and use of toilet facilities.” The few female inmates that spoke out about their abuse suffered physical reprisals from the guards and staff ultimately producing a violent chilling effect throughout the national prison population. Are we protecting these women? There is no parity across the states regarding custodial sexual misconduct. Six states have no laws prohibiting sexual relations between inmates and correctional staff; four states make the inmate criminally liable for engaging in sexual conduct, and the law in 19 states does not cover all forms of sexual abuse.

Tragically and heartache in their suspended lifestyle, horror and brutality in their everyday life; the female prison population has been ignored, again, during this opportunity provided by the Martha Stewart Show. Instead, the women return to their overcrowded cells (average state prison is 8 percent over-capacity, average federal prison is 33 percent over-capacity), fearful of physical confrontation by not only fellow inmates but the prison staff as well, and given no prospect to prepare for life on the outside. No educational opportunities, no vocational training, no individualized counseling. No adequate health care. No network of support on the outside. It becomes easier and easier to see why the prison industry is most certainly a growth industry.

Although we are a nation that professes a belief in second chances, the reality for our female prison population past and present is not indicative of this mantra. Martha’s spectacle aside, female prisoners are haunted by their prison time. Housing, employment, education, and the like are just a few aspects where this shadow impedes their second chance. But there is some hope. Congresswoman Danny Davis of the seventh district in Illinois and a bi-partisan coalition has introduced the Second Chance Act of 2005 designed to help “ex-offenders successfully reintegrate back into civilian life.” Representative Davis stated during the announcement, “No matter what, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and jobs are the cures for incarceration. These men, women and children still have to live in our communities and need all of the help we can give them because when we help them, we help ourselves.” This legislation is only a beginning, but a necessary beginning that moves the status quo away from simply warehousing our prison population in a labyrinth of violence and hopelessness towards embracing the humanity of emancipation.
The Challenges of Media Reform

By Laura Stengrim

More than 200 people converged in downtown St. Louis in mid-May for an historic meeting of citizens, journalists, activists, scholars, artists, policymakers, and media producers, all dedicated to solving a crisis that threatens the roots of American democracy: the media. Readers of the Public i—its very existence being to counter the onslaught of big corporate media—a doubt know already that democracy depends on a free press. Likewise, those reading this paper, following the activities of the UCIMC, tuning into WEFT, nosing about on various blogspheres, or attempting in any way to be more active consumers of news and information likely know about the problems already: deregulation, corporate consolidation, Bushie propagandaizing, Ruthergate, Sinclair Broadcasting, Clear Channel, and the recent Newsweek retraction, to name a few.

Many of the St. Louis Media Reform magnates, including Sy Hersh, Phil Donahue, Bernie Sanders, and Maurice Hinchee, who had the week before appeared in Champaign-Urbana for a separate conference, and as one might expect, several of the themes addressed were alarmingly consistent. All were in agreement that something must be done, now: One of the most compelling, sobering, worrying analyses of the pathetic state of America and our media comes from the inquisitive Canadian journalist Naomi Klein: “When US democracy is in crisis, the world is in crisis. When Americans learn geography through religion and war, we are in crisis.”

But I didn’t venture to St. Louis to hear dire proclamations, wallow in my ongoing patriotic misery in the company of like-minded others, nor to report back that we have reached the sunset of enlightenment. Rather, I went to St. Louis to experience the optimism, hope, creativity and intelligence that is defining the media reform movement. Over all the spirit of St. Louis was one of people coming together to learn, laugh, and act for change. Al Franken and Jim Hightower entertained us. Amy Goodman, Medea Benjamin, and Representative Diane Watson inspired us. Policymakers, politicians, and keynote speakers brought us to our feet, drawing cheers and applause as they committed themselves to saving democracy through media reform. I left St. Louis with the feeling that our hard work is worth it, our movement is sustainable, and that we must continue in our tireless efforts.

A sinking feeling arises again, however, when I look at the challenges faced by the media reform movement, and progressivism more generally at this historic juncture. Please allow me to toss aside any pretense of journalistic objectivity or balance to be frank about such challenges:

Technology: Urbana, thanks largely to the efforts of a handful of people working with the UCIMC, is an exemplar of community-based internet access; likewise, the worldwide Indymedia movement, starting with the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, has thrived by appropriating the technologies of globalization. Savvy internet users can stream media from all over the world, progressives can connect with one another through web sites and blogs, and, as we saw last year, entire presidential campaigns can be both motivated and derailed online. But what about access to Internet-capable computers? What about print culture, and newspapers, such as this one? What happens when Internet service providers become increasingly privatized and therefore more expensive and more limited?

Power: At the Media Reform Conference, it became clear to me that the most powerful figures in our movement are affluent white men. Sure, these figures are sympathetic to the plight of the working class; sure, having lived through the civil rights and movement, the 60s, they are sympathetic to the civil rights and feminist movements; sure, being open-minded liberals, they support gay rights, reproductive rights, immigrant rights, and workers rights. Is it a problem, then, that the leadership of the media reform movement is largely comprised of affluent white men? After all, they write the very founders of this democracy now in such peril. However, the tokenism seen in St. Louis remains troubling to me.

Coherence: I met and saw so many wonderful people at the conference, ranging from young pink-haired anarchists to Pacifica radio producers, to professors, to elderly Democrats, to young liberals, to closet policy wonks like myself. Robert McChesney and his cadre of dedicated, organized, and talented media reformers deserve great credit and should still blush with pride at the success of the conference and the movement. Yet I worry about sustainability. It’s one thing to gather together for a rousing weekend of speeches and entertainment, and yet quite another to ensure that the momentum is strong enough to endure another three years of the Bush administration, FCC rulings, and judicial appointments, not to mention unforeseen repercussions of war and terror. How can a media reform movement achieve a coherent balance between creative production of video, radio, print, and web content while still engaged in policy reformation and lobbying?

Audience: As a student of rhetoric, I am particularly concerned with the notion of audience: that is, are writers, speakers, and artists communicating as best they can to their readers, listeners, and other happenstance consumers? The Public i, for example, prints approximately 4,000 papers ten months out of the year. We are not certain how many people actually read our paper, nor how many people toss them in the garbage (please recycle, at least!), nor how many clip articles and pass them along to friends. Sure, I fantasize that Maureen Dowd or Katha Pollitt will someday soon call me up to work with them at the New York Times or The Nation, but in the meantime how can we be assured that independent, non-corporate, anti-conglomerate media is arriving at the doorsteps, eyes, and brains of those who would most benefit from it?
Kevin Coe is a doctoral student in the Department of Speech Communication. His research focuses on the interaction of political discourse, news media, and public opinion.

Bush...has taken (the common American practice of mixing religion and politics) to heights previously unseen in the modern presidency.

Catholic fraternal organization, successfully lobbied Congress and President Eisenhower to have the words “under God” inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance as a means of distinguishing Americans from “Godless communists.” And, to this day, several states have constitutions that bar from public office those who refuse to profess a belief in the existence of a divine being.

Bush, however, has taken this common American practice of mixing religion and politics to heights previously unseen in the modern presidency. It would be comforting to think that the president’s elevated use of religious language was mere political posturing, ultimately of little consequence in terms of determining policy. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Bolstered by religious conservatives’ ascendancy in the political sphere, Bush has moved God to the center of his language and his political decision-making. The Bush administration’s pursuit of “faith-based” initiatives, the voucher system that provides government funds to pay for students’ tuition at religious schools, the push for constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, and the Manifest-Destiny-like invasion and occupation of Iraq all smack of religious motivations finding their way into governmental policy.

Perhaps what is most frightening aspect of all of this is that the president is unabashed in admitting that his religious shapes his policies. Bush made this clear during the final presidential debate of the 2004 campaign, saying: “I believe that God wants everybody to be free. That’s what I believe. And that’s part of my foreign policy. In Afghanistan, I believe that the freedom there is a gift from the Almighty.”

This statement alone should be enough to raise the hackles of citizens interested in preserving some semblance of American separation of church and state. Although Bush’s fondness for sermonizing may be due in part to his upbringing, it is also a strategy aimed at pleasing the substantial voting block of religious conservatives—a strategy that appears to have paid off for the president during his narrow reelection last November. Ultimately, it matters little whether Bush is a “true believer,” a callous strategist, or some combination of the two. The outcome of this conflation of religion and politics is what matters, and the outcome is clear. When our president bases policy decisions as much upon divine guidance as upon the will of the electorate, only one conclusion can be drawn: we are living in a theocracy. Pundits’ frequent bickering about the risks of theocracy in the Middle East creates an unfortunate irony: dead-set on promoting a particular vision of democracy abroad, we are sliding toward theocracy at home.

It is a dangerous situation, one with which all of us, regardless of our individual political and religious beliefs, should be concerned. Confusing the abstract realm of the metaphysical with the concrete goals of the state leads to a place where political leaders’ untoward acts are easily excused because they are thought to serve a higher purpose. In the current political climate, this is a place that America can ill afford to go.
Neighborhoods seemed relatively undifferentiated. The city, one had to take elevated roads. Most of the cars that one sees are taxis. Most people travel by motor scooters or small motor cycles. Many also just ride bicycles. Visitors can take taxis that are good for longer distance travel like the airport. If it happens to be hot outside, all of them are conditioned. Also available are cycles, a sort of rickshaw driven by a cyclist behind the passenger rather than in front. One can either rent a motor scooter or hire a ride from someone who has one, but just walking is a pleasure in this city that is usually much cooler and less humid than Bangkok. While Bangkok is inexpensive by U.S. standards, Hanoi is even less expensive. But in both cities the people are extremely nice to foreigners. Despite the 2 to 3 million Vietnamese killed, the ecological devastation, the continuing physical and mental after-effects of the chemicals like Agent Orange (used by the U.S. government to defoliate their country), and the post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by Vietnamese as well as Americans, Steve and I were not reproached over the war that our government inflicted on these people or over its earlier support of French colonialism. Two things, troubling things, were missing in Hanoi. First, I saw few old people. Second, both in Hanoi, with its tree-lined streets and its beautiful lakes, as well as in the countryside, I heard no birds singing and saw no birds. I can’t help wondering if this missing generation and missing genius were results of our war against these people and their environment. If so, it deepens their senseless loss and our legacy of war crimes, which continues to accumulate elsewhere even as I write.

Thailand has been losing economic ground to some of the lesser developed countries, and I was told that there is now a significant migration of Thai people looking for jobs elsewhere. Vietnam, on the other hand, is a much poorer country but it is attracting a lot of transnational businesses. This became apparent when Steve and I made a trip to Ha Long Bay. Ha Long Bay is truly one of the wonders of the world and is so declared by UNESCO. It is a Bay on the north coast of Vietnam in which over 3,000 narrow mountain-like islands jut straight up out of the sea. Aside from the natural beauty, which for me is as spectacular as the Grand Canyon, there are also the fascinating floating villages where people who have found it impossible to make a living off of the land have built permanent homes. These homes are on rafts and the people make a living off of fishing and fish farming. One of the villages that we visited by sea kayak had 500 people living in it. Ha Long Bay is a great place to relax on a jank, swim, and kayak. We went out as a group, but later to Ha Long Bay we had to travel on the main road from Hanoi to Haiphong, a port that had been heavily bombed by the Americans. Steve, who had been on that road six years before, warned me that it was going to be a hair-raising trip. In fact, he was stunned to see a wide and good road with new manufacturing establishments lining both sides almost the entire length of the 3 hour trip. Vietnam is indeed very poor. But Vietnam is developing with a mixture of private investment and plant and government-owned operations. What we saw on the road was private, undoubtedly attracted by labor that is cheaper than Chinese or Thai labor. It will be interesting to see whether this one-party state will go as whole hog for capitalism as China is doing or whether it will retain a greater element of socialism in its economy. There are, indeed, all kinds of privately-owned small shops and businesses in the towns and cities. But the influx of the manufacturing multinationals from all over the world is a new phenomenon that brings wealth but that can also have downsides such as labor exploitation, a very uneven income and wealth distribution, and threats to the traditional economies.

Some of the most interesting traditional economies are in the far north, near the Chi-
eral higher-end stores that feature silk items, such as cloth—always some of the most colorful woven work that one will find. Owners or waiters, whether one finds their persistence interesting or not, are almost always some of the most colorful woven wares on the streets of Sapa outside of the market. The old women, particularly the H’mong people, especially young girls and old women (in these mountains, which did not suffer direct American attacks, I did see many old people) are much more aggressive about selling their wares on the streets of Sapa outside of the market. The old women, particularly, do not hesitate to place a hat or another article of clothing on a visitor who is protesting that he or she is not interested in the item. They have even been known to follow people into restaurants, usually to be hustled by the owners or waiters. Whatever one finds their persistence annoying or amusing, what they have to sell is almost always some of the most colorful woven wares on the streets of Sapa. One can find all the wares that one wishes to see anywhere in the world. In addition to this, there are several higher-end stores that feature silk items, such as clothing and pillow covers, that reflect the fine silk and colorful work of the local people.

While most of the minority people living near Sapa have had limited, if any, formal education, a number have picked up English largely from the predominantly Australian tourists who have been frequenting the area. Thus they are not just people dressed and adorned in interesting ways offering beautiful crafts, they are also often people with whom one can have conversations and from whom one can learn things about the way their daily lives. They will often ask you about as well.

My ten days in northern Vietnam were an extraordinary experience that I would encourage others to share. The flight is expensive, but there are frequent flights available per person.

While the small tourist industry provides one with the chance to meet some of the nicest people I have ever met in my many years of travel, to aid their economy, and to reach out to a country so badly devastated by our government in the 1960s and 1970s, I cannot afford to travel there and would like to help them economically, educationally, and medically, consider a contribution to East Meets West Foundation (www.easterntoest.org). In significant ways, they attempt against extraordinary damage that our government delivered upon these warm and forgiving people who refuse to be dominated by others, whether they be French, Japanese, or American.
White Guys with Guitars:
Indy Musicians on Tour in Acoustic La-La-Land
by Darrin Drda

Darrin Drda is a long-time C-U resident, part-time musician, and full-time Buddhist with a big-time insufficiency complex that compels him to publish verbose travel journals.

SOMETIMES IN 2004... shortly after the seasonal withering of my freelance work and not too long before the traumatic presidential election, I began having daydreams of becoming a troubadour. I’d just bought myself a Martin guitar that seemed to write songs by itself, as well as a 1979 Mercedes diesel that I planned to run on vegetable oil after the installation of a second trunk. Little did I know that it would take a full seven months for the long-dormant car to be revived to “good working condition and safe to drive,” as per my agreement with the seller, Bernice, an obviously over-committed mechanic with a thing for German cars.

She’s got a leather interior and an engine that never will cease
All others are inferior because she runs on vegetable grease
It don’t make her sweeter, nor her energy is ever increased
And it makes me cheerier, because I know that we’re headed for peace
Me and my Mercedes... gonna save the world.

(from Me and My Mercedes by Darrin Drda)

In the face of post-election depression and winter del-drums, I nevertheless maintained a vernal vision of myself criss-crossing the country on the amber nectar discarded by fast food joints and roadside diners, playing music of peace and social change. I would live frugally on tips and out-of-the-trunk CD sales, earning fans one by one and making friends in each cultural oasis. I would be the very poster boy of freedom — true freedom, mind you, not the kind being falsely advertised on TV.

Well I hear you say that freedom is a thing that you hold dear
And to you it may sound like treason when I say that freedom is what you most fear
And you talk about democracy as a thing that you promote
And you say that’s the way it’s got to be and you shove it down the peoples’ throat
And I see the lies that you’re tellin’ me
And you’d better just be quiet
Cuz I realize what you’re tellin’ me
And I’ve never gonna buy it

(from Never Gonna Buy It by Darrin Drda)

The only cloud in my sunlit dream was a vague fear of solitude, not wanting to undertake the adventure alone. As I began strengthening my resolve, the answer came in the form of my friend Scarth, a fellow musician living in Oakland, whom I’d met in India late last millennium. In one of our periodic email exchanges, I learned that he, too, was serious — periodic email exchanges, I mean — about promoting our act, or even describing our music to the uninformed. One part of course would be having to buy our freedom from the rich politicians or the devil in disguise of the Christian Coalition. Keep your eyes on the prize that’s hidden in the rhythm of the heart and it’s easy to imagine no religion, no division. But it isn’t gonna happen just a-sittin’ and a-wishin’ People got to take action, start a revolution of the heart. Start a revolution of the heart. Be part of the solution, be smart. The heart is a muscle the size of your fist. You’ve got to keep livin’, rise up and resist...

(from Evolution of the Heart by Darrin Drda)

As the CD neared completion, I scheduled a release show for March 10, an ambitious deadline which led to a week-long test of the band’s musical and psychological limits. With elbow grease and caffeine, we managed to finish our project in time, which is more than can be said about Bernie the mechanic. Alas, the Mercedes was deemed road-worthy a few days before the first scheduled West Coast tour date of April 2, not enough time to complete its conversion to veggie oil. Necessity dictated that I buy a plane ticket to San Francisco and that we to do the tour in Scarth’s Subaru station wagon, a.k.a. “Sparky.” Though the engine had been reworked after a recent accident, the body retained the scars: mismatched fenders, a wrapped hood, and bungee cords securing the passenger side headlight. The most humbling part, of course, was to buy our freedom from Arco and the other Emperors of Oil, at West Coast prices that often approached $3 per gallon.

Here it comes, here it comes down the avenue. Everyone better run, cuz it’s comin’ after you. It’s a two-ton missile made of chrome and steel, It’s my overdriven, terrorizin’ Deathmobile... Well, it runs on the blood of those in foreign lands. Who dare to keep our oil underneath their sand. But nothin’ can destroy the special joy I feel For my gas-guzzlin’, mess-destructin’ Deathmobile... (from Deathmobile, by Darrin Drda)

My arrival in Oakland was a joyful reunion with old friends and a chance to make new ones, many of them members of the Earthville house (www.earthville.net), home to a handful of hip and hug-happy artists, musicians and activists. The first few days were spent practicing with Scarth, sorting through the details of the weeks ahead and buying last-minute accessories, among them a thrift store lamp needed to illuminate the LCD of Scarth’s drum machine. Known as Drumbot accessories, among them a thrift store lamp needed to illuminate the LCD of Scarth’s drum machine. Known as Drumbot

Change the world and breakin’ some hearts, those White Guys with Guitars
Playing coffee shops All across the nation
Looking for props and appreciation
Nothing can stop the Caucasian invasion (of...)
White Guys with Guitars...

(from White Guys with Guitars, by Darrin Drda)

Our three-day stay in Portland offered us the chance to practice, catch up on quality dining and sleep, and attend a couple open mics (see song above). After bidding farewell to the gracious neurologists who hosted our stay and to Scarth’s wife Sparkey and Darrin in Oakland, ready to hit the road

The tour poster that would inspire homophobes

So this is my prayer, for those who are searching for the furnace that burns away lives, and leaves what is true behind
And we all go the way down
To where none of this matters at all
And when you think you’ve hit the bottom, there’s further to fall...

(from All the Way Down, by Scarth Locke)

With our similar musical and spiritual sensibilities, the question of a Scarth and Darrin tour quickly turned from “if” to “why.” Once we decided upon the “where” of the West Coast, Scarth began the tedious task of booking shows, whaling away countless cellphone minutes and afternoons on the web. Though I tried to pick up some slack on my end, I was largely preoccupied with the recording of Theory of Everything’s 2nd CD, and I was keen to get it finished and begin spreading the musical message that would, of course, change the world.

Well, it isn’t hard to see that we’re livin’ in a prison
And to a degree, we’re victims of the system
But we can be free if we listen to the wisdom of the heart
And don’t believe the lies of the rich politicians
Or the devil in disguise of the Christian Coalition
Keep your eyes on the prize that’s hidden in the rhythm of the heart
And it’s easy to imagine no religion, no division
But it isn’t gonna happen just a-sittin’ and a-wishin’
People got to take action, start a revolution of the heart. Start a revolution of the heart. Be part of the solution, be smart.

The heart is a muscle the size of your fist. You’ve got to keep livin’, rise up and resist...

(from Evolution of the Heart by Darrin Drda)

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(from White Guys with Guitars, by Darrin Drda)
Karina, we headed further north to Seattle. Scarth’s mother, who lives on Lake Washington, was kind enough to put up in for a couple nights and to be one of the few responsive audi- ence members at the colorfully-painted El Diablo coffee shop. Another enthusiastic fan appeared in the pint-sized form of a three-year-old girl who danced merly during the first part of our show. Notably, it wasn’t the first time on our tour that we had inspired a toddler to cut the rug, leading us to wonder whether we were doing something horribly wrong or remark- ably right. We did seem to be inspiring a certain kind of move- ment, though not exactly the kind I had imagined.

Is that a baby in her belly, or is it just because she’s fat? If it’s a baby, what will she call it? When you had me, did you look like that? She is dancing... What are doing when I can’t see you from my big chair by the door? You say you’re working for a living, but tell me: what are you living for?

Are you dancing? I am three years and a half now, I will soon be a boy of four. After that, well you know how time flies, I’ll be dancing out the door...

(from Mo’s Waltz, by Scarth Locke)

After a pair of mediocre shows in the Seattle area, we set- tled in for our longest commute of the tour, a 13-hour drive south to Chico, CA. It had already become all-too-clearly clear that our tour schedule was on the ambitious side geographical- ly. Though we did wind through some breathtaking landscapes, the money spent on gas and parking and speeding tickets, as well as the long hours sacrificed behind the wheel, came with- out the assurance of a generous and adoring crowd at the end of each stretch. The show at Café Flo in Chico looked to be another example of imbalance as we began our setup, but before too long the small café was crowded with smiling strangers who soon became friends. Our hostess, Liz, and barrista Kelly acquainted us with Chico’s youthful night life, and we slept soundly that night with full bellies and hearts.

Somewhere down the road We’ll see the welcome sign And everything will be just fine someday And we’ll get all what we’re owed There’ll be nothing left to fear, because the wind is gonna clear the clouds away And when I close my eyes, love, there you are You’re so close but yet so far (from So Close But Yet So Far, by Darrin Drda)

Our experience in Chico taught us the value of booking shows in smaller towns, where folks tend to be less cynical, perhaps, and have fewer entertainment options, to be sure. Unfortunately, this was to be our last taste of such intimacy, as we continued south to a well-peopled multimedia art event in the heart of La-La Land – Hollywood. Our performance at “Create-Fixate” was little more than background music for the heart of La-La Land – Hollywood. Our performance at the last show was Dara’s friends Jesse and Katie, who, like Scarth and me, spent the night at the Earthville house. In the morning, Jesse shared a few of his songs, each with a tenderness that betrayed his former involvement in a metal band that once opened for Metallica. Later I made a coffee excursion with Katie, a New York actress and singer, exchanging stories and perspectives on the Big Questions. Scarth, meanwhile, stayed in and sorted through receipts, calculating that we had indeed lost money on the tour, although not as much as we’d both anticipated.

Before long it was time to take one last ride in Sparky, and to say goodbye to Scarth. As we drove to the BART stop, we talked a little about what the tour had taught us, but found it hard to articulate what we were feeling exactly. We had shared a 3-week emotional roller coaster ride, an amazing adventure, and we searched for some pithy or profound words that might sum up the experience or wrap it neatly with a bow. But nothing came to mind. The question of when or if we might do another tour was left to linger. All we knew as we embraced at the turnstile was that we would remain bond- ed as friends and committed to using music as a way to express the incredible mysteries of love and life.

There is beauty everywhere I look I know because I read it in your favorite book The one you like to keep beside the bed To read when storms are brewing inside your head It says it matters what you do...in the meantime... We’ve got confusing things like hope to occupy us We’ve got confusing things like dreams to occupy us in the meantime... And I thought I knew what love was, but I never got it right. And I thought I knew surrender, but I always end up back in the fight... Maybe there’s something I can help you find. Don’t know what it is, but in the meantime... (from Meantime by Scarth Locke)

Darrin’s music can be heard at www.myspace.com/dar-rindra, or www.darrindrda.org. He plays periodically in C- U, sometimes with his band, Theory of Everything. A few of Scarth’s songs are at www.sonicbids.com/ scarthlocke

Weiths of eyes and faces that go black Eyes and ears and mouths that will attack Your attention to the center ring Muscle men and showgirls in the wings Fool, where did you go wrong?

Aiming to please but striking the song. Hero, villain, jester, fool, am I / Is this a hello or goodbye? (from Fool by Kim Fox)

As we pulled out of LA on our way to ASU in Phoenix, the Activities Coordinator on the other end of the deal and of the cellphone canceled the show, fearing we wouldn’t make it in time. Since we were headed that direction anyhow, we sped across the desert, determined to prove her wrong and to fulfill the most lucrative contract of the tour. We succeeded on both accounts, although trying to convey the spirit of “student appreciation day” to undergrads scurrying between buildings on the quad proved fairly fruitless.

Unable to find a campground, we squatted that night at a state park. As we slept uncomfortably under the stars, we were awakened by a herd of horses that almost literally stumbled upon our bodies amidst the tall brush. Next morning we bathed in the river and found a safe and legal campsite southwest of town, in a picturesque valley filled with Saguaro and other types of cacti. Our pregessions and well-traveled neigh- bor Lewis, himself a musician, warned of us the “mean motherfuckers” we would likely be playing for in downtown Tucson. Though we took this words with a grain of salt, they turned out to be prophetic, as we were made to feel most unwelcome by a few drunken hecklers at The Grill who later defaced our posters and plastered them across Sparky’s windshield.

Back up now and give me space. It’s time I took my place. Everybody gather round. Listen to the master expound, on the wonder of Pride, push back, it’s a natural fact, fat kid on a swingset. Push, push back, it’s a natural fact, it’s gonna knock you down. If you don’t think I am qualified, let me assure you I have analyzed Every book written since 2047 BC. Damn right, damn right I got...Pride... If you don’t like what I’ve got to say, you can just pack your things and go away. (from Pride, by Scarth Locke)

The crowd at The Tiki Lounge in San Diego was much more hospitable. We shared the bill with two other white guys guitar bands, a fourth act of feisty females having unfortunately canceled. From there we crossed the burning sands of Arizona and were attended by a spate of friendly and appreciative, crowds, which included our hosts, Joane and Chris. Though we had to hit the road at 4 am, their delightful company and backyard jacuzzi were hard to say goodbye to, and we squeezed in little more than a nap before heading to LA for an early afternoon slot at the annual music festival of Scarth’s alma mater, Pitzer College. At Khohtekut, as it’s called, we encountered a decent reception from the thumbnail crowd and a royal welcome from the organizers, who laminated us with platters of BBQ tofu, veggies, cheese, and scrumptious vegan cookies. The afternoon was spent consuming free beer and music whilst romping on the lawn with friends (old to Scarth, new to me).

Among them was Tommy Jordan of the pop-funk band Veggy Tah, who extended an invitation to join him at a rare, all-night performance of King Sunny Ade, and to crash at his house in Pomona. Already overtired, we were sad to decline the offer and accept the latter, but not before frolic- ing with Tommy in his tastefully-cluttered musical play- ground. Upon waking, we unpacked and re-packed the car to make room for Tommy who needed a ride to San Francisco, and headed north, swapping stories and songs.

All I wanna do is to tune in / Radio L.A. Lujah ‘Cause we’re broadcasting live! And we wanna hear all of you On the mic is Veggy Tah / But a whole lot more of you / Let us hear ya, let us hear ya / In a big echoing holla All I wanna do is to thank you / Even though I don’t know who you are You let me change lanes / While I was driving in my car (from Whoever You Are by Veggy Tah)

For our final show at the I.C.A.N. Gallery in the Mission, we embraced at the turnstile was that we would remain bond- ed as friends and committed to using music as a way to express the incredible mysteries of love and life.