

Their names are ubiquitous.

They're busy as beavers, with regular gigs booked at Touchstone Coffee House, Borders Books and Starbucks. They're a community presence, long-standing staples in the scene, fixtures in the *Just Out* events calendar.

They're Barb Galloway and Donna Luckett—or, as Luckett charmingly sums up: "I'm the short, cute one. Barb's the tall, talented one."

After hearing about this infamous musical couple around the office for almost a year, I was excited to finally learn more about the duo than just their names.

"Playing music is not a hobby, it's how we earn a living," Luckett asserts in her Southern drawl, compliments of growing up in Tennessee. In fact, they scoff at unpaid gigs (including Portland's pride celebration, which, unlike Vancouver's Saturday in the Park, only pays out-of-town acts).

It's apparent that music nearly encompasses their lives. Luckett says her day job—as a social services worker for the state of Oregon—enables them to play their music. She spends the rest of her time as the group's booking agent, promoter and bass player. Galloway is the principal songwriter and lead guitarist (and occasional home renovator). Oh yeah, and they're a couple.

I met them on one of their rare nights off at their co-owned, modest home in North Portland. I'm first greeted by the lesser-known duo of the house: Keelah and Cedar, the couple's Labradors. Keelah, the older of the two, keeps to herself while Cedar becomes well acquainted with my lap.

Before Luckett has a chance to show me around the house, I spy a neatly arranged, covered pile of instruments behind the couch in the living room (complete with a "Celebrate Diversity" bumper sticker on the bass drum). This area, I discover, is their practice space, where they come together every Sunday night to jam. "Our neighbor drinks a beer on his front porch and listens every time we practice," Luckett says.

The first thing to know about Galloway and Luckett—the entity—is that it's not always a duo. At several gigs and on the group's 1998 full-length CD, *When I'm With You*, their friend Cacy Lee accompanies them on drums and Kiera O'Hara plays piano. "We kind of make a commitment to keep women in the group," Luckett says.

Although O'Hara left the group in February to focus on her new jazz trio, Portland vocal authority Maureen Kelly recently joined the lineup, much to Galloway and Luckett's delight.

"She can rattle the windows without an effort," Luckett says. "Maureen's put a new spark in the group."

The second thing to know about Galloway and Luckett is that they're lesbians who play music but who don't play womyn's music.

"We play folk, blues, country, bluegrass, rock, jazz. We're floozies," Luckett says, combining "folk" and "blues" into



Maureen Kelly (left) recently joined Donna Luckett and Barb Galloway as a vocalist

## The long and the short of it

Veteran musicians won't let anything slow them down

BY KATY DAVIDSON

one definitive word. "We'll play anything—we see a person three feet tall, we'll do 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' at the drop of a hat."

Galloway, a former motocross racer who grew up in the Portland area, gained some of her first performing experience during the 1970s and '80s doing Joni Mitchell cover tunes and playing with the well-known Dyketones, a '50s-style band with a lesbianic kick.

*When I'm With You* is a mature, well-polished set of Galloway's tunes. It truly sheds light on her mixed palette of musical influences, which include Mitchell, Portland songstress Connie Cohen and various jazz artists. Whereas the title track is a folksy, bluesy jaunt, "Sometimes I Love You" and "Just Because" are inspirational acoustic ballads, and "Lazy Sunday" is a beautiful, introspective instrumental.

Lyrical, *When I'm With You* just as easily could have been called *When I'm Without You*. The first two songs demonstrate an urge to break free, with lyrics like "you wanna go / do you wanna go?" and "I'm on the road to anywhere." Aptly enough, Galloway, a shy woman in person, says music always has been a release for her.

"Barb lets the music speak for her. I can shut up and she still won't talk," Luckett says. "She talks the music out of the guitar. She gets in a trancelike state."

Luckett goes on to explain her partner's writing style: "Barb just disappears into her studio. I've even seen her wake up in the middle of the night with an idea for a song."

Galloway reportedly has written "volumes and volumes" of songs. Luckett once unearthed one of her partner's recordings in their basement and began crying as she listened because it was so beautiful. When she asked why they never played it, Galloway said it was because the song was written about someone else. Luckett said she didn't care.

When I ask her if she's a songwriter, too, she replies, "I have written some of the corniest, hokiest shit you've ever heard in your life."

Luckett, whose first instrument was saxophone, says she's happy just to play bass for the group. "I just wanna keep things simple," she says, although she has been known to perform a mean version of "House of the Rising Sun" to the tune of "Amazing Grace."

As if the couple's plate isn't full enough already, Galloway and Luckett (who are both "older than dirt," according to Luckett) have been chewing on two major life alterations: the onset of a multiple sclerosis-type disease in Galloway and the possibility of adopting a child.

Galloway says her condition, called spastic paraparesis, affects her lower extremities and makes walking difficult and running next to impossible. Fortunately, the disease doesn't affect her masterful guitar-playing ability.

Her fingers still rip the same solos, but now she sits down when the group performs. She puts it simply: "It's very exhausting."

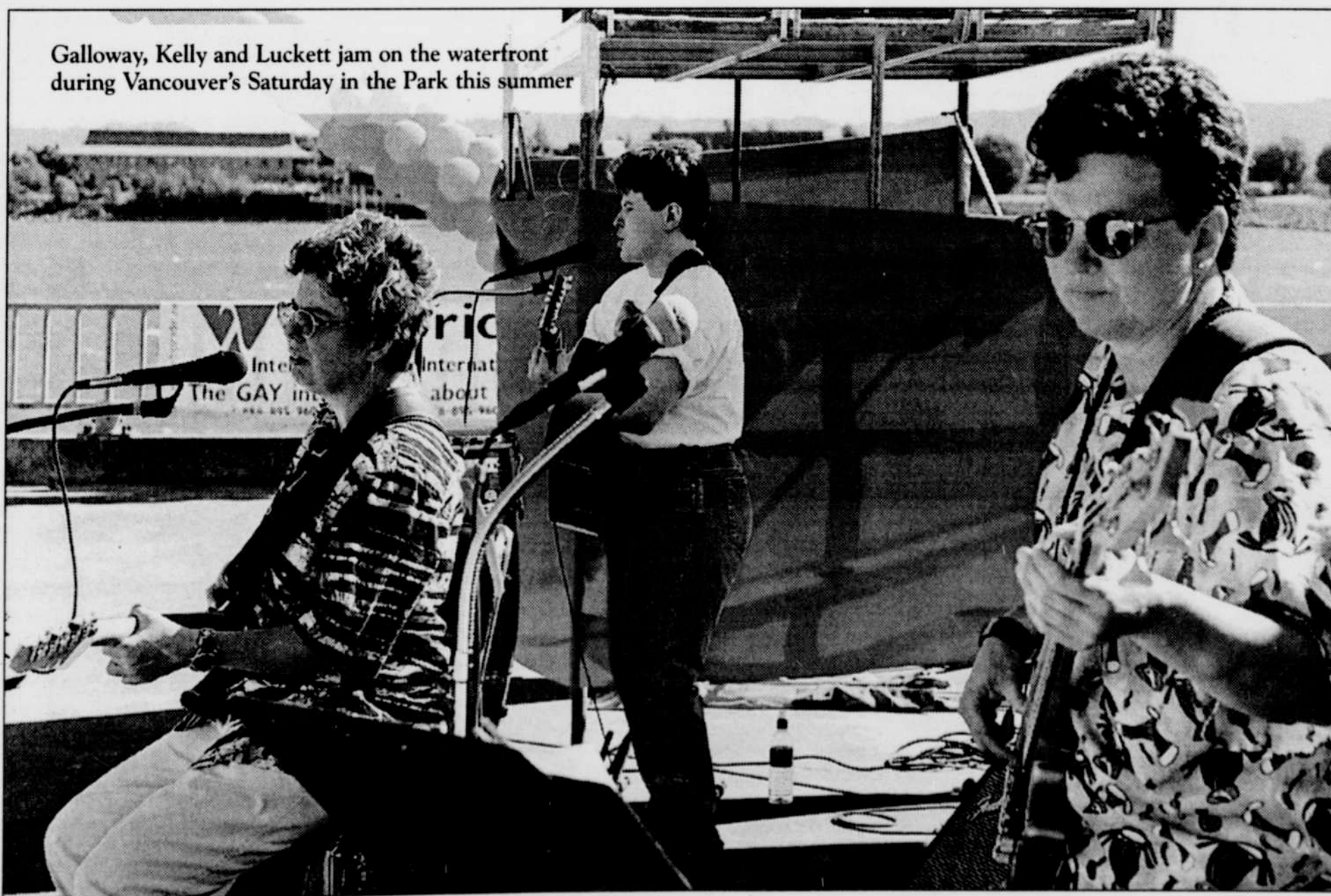
Luckett says the idea of having a child had been rattling around in her head for a while,

and the couple now have entered the "long and tedious" adoption process. Because of legal reasons, Luckett says she can't reveal too much more information about their soon-to-be child, although she admits: "We want a little girl. We want to let her become what she will."

Despite these changes, the music remains the constant force in Galloway and Luckett's lives. They continue to practice every Sunday. They continue to play gigs every weekend. They continue to devote their lives to music.

And who knows, as Luckett says, "One of these days, we're going to be on Oprah."

■ KATY DAVIDSON is a *Just Out* staff writer who wants to be on Oprah—but for other reasons. She can be reached at [katy@justout.com](mailto:katy@justout.com).



Galloway, Kelly and Luckett jam on the waterfront during Vancouver's Saturday in the Park this summer

PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS