

No single word describes Barbara Bernstein. At the least, *Just Out* settles on three: energy, creativity and commitment.

The radio commentator, musician, writer and activist is one of those people who seems to be in motion even when she is sitting still. The host of KBOO-FM's weekly call-in social justice program *Locus Focus*, she has talents that run in several directions, sometimes all at once.

Bernstein has created documentary programs on a wide variety of subjects. Her collaborations with videographer Elaine Velazquez, her partner of 18 1/2 years, have been used to fight anti-gay ballot measures. The women constantly are planning new projects addressing social justice, especially environmental, feminist and sexual minority concerns.

They met in 1978, when Velazquez needed someone to do sound for a project. Bernstein looked into the job but wasn't able to join in because she was attending school.

The two reconnected in 1981 through Do Jump! Theatre. Bernstein worked with Velazquez doing sound for *Moving Mountains*. "In the middle of it," she says mischievously, "we fell in love and she stopped paying me."

Velazquez doesn't share Bernstein's focus on radio, although she has helped with the production of her lover's CDs, including the latest series, *Radio Tales for the Road*. Likewise, Bernstein frequently helps Velazquez with her video projects.

Music always has been important to Bernstein. She plays a number of instruments—guitar, recorder, kalimba and bass—although her favorite is viola.

She is still well remembered for playing a mean fiddle in the Hester Street Klezmer Band.

RISK JOCKEY

Radio commentator Barbara Bernstein has made a living by asking tough questions by Patricia L. MacAodha

She also composes music in several genres, singing her own compositions most recently on her CD *Maps of Memory*.

Bernstein grew up in Worcester, Mass., which she remembers as "a dead place." She attended high school during the Vietnam era and clashed with her parents for participating in public anti-war activities.

Fortunately for her budding activist nature, she was able to turn to her maternal aunt, Adele Prager, for support. Divorced in 1960, the single mother of three opened a window to Bernstein "that pointed out the difference between how she lived and how I lived." Watching Prager struggle sensitized her to the fact that not all people were raised enjoying the same privileges.

To be a divorced woman at that time was to experience social disapproval, but Bernstein's affection for her aunt led her to a different conclusion. "My parents used her as a negative role model, and I used her as a positive one," she says.

While attending Barnard College in New York City, Bernstein found herself happily in the heart of East Coast political activism. Within a week of arriving on campus, she was involved in a demonstration along with more than a quarter-million people.

But newscasters reported the event as having far fewer participants. "I had my first taste of how mainstream media can distort numbers," she says.

While in New York, Bernstein became a vol-

unteer with WBAI-FM, a significant move that would begin her association with public radio. She came to Oregon in 1971 and soon began volunteering with KBOO.

A new project for the award-winning journalist is focused on the watersheds of the Columbia and Colorado rivers and how they are being engineered out of existence. The program, *Rivers That Were*, will air sometime next fall. About two-thirds of the material for the documentary has come from interviews.

Bernstein's extensive experience with interviewing people includes a period of time grilling Lon Mabon. She became well acquainted with the Oregon Citizens Alliance chairman while interviewing him for Pacifica Radio.

Mabon talked to her about his experiences in Vietnam and what he feared. "I have problems with him being caricatured as a monster," she says, but nevertheless is pleased about his recent arrest.

Bernstein has talked to many people whose views radically differ from her own. "When I go as a journalist," she says, "I need to suspend my own beliefs." She goes as far as she can with this, respectfully listening as people share their feelings, concerns and needs.



Barbara Bernstein finds relief from her busy schedule by trekking to the mountains whenever she can

For escape, she travels to the mountains as often as possible. "I have a lot of time for myself. I've decided over the years I'm a Taoist. I'm a tree-hugger," she laughs.

Bernstein's stories reflect the path of a dreamer turned activist turned future-looking writer and performer. Her politics, spirituality and creativity are merged together.

As she sings on "Dark Horse Lovers" from *Maps of Memory*: "It's time to learn what we don't know; and face the overwhelming fears that know no words, just tears." ■

KBOO-FM's LOCUS FOCUS airs 7:30 to 9 a.m. Wednesdays on 90.7 in Portland; 92.7 in White Salmon, Wash.; and 100.7 in Corvallis.

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