

# Graduate Humanities



students and faculty collaboratively exploring  
the arts, history, culture, and literature in an  
open experimental multidisciplinary environment

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## Living in Music

By Trish Hatfield ('08), Program Assistant

In the Spring 2012 *Graduate Humanities*, Angelica Settle ('08) said in an interview, "I wanted to 'see' a book—not just the words, but why the book was done the way it was. A book has to have bones, meat. By that I mean content, interpretation, and meaning." Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, Director of the Graduate Humanities Program, piggybacks on this by applying it to songs and singing of the Oklahoma Kiowa Indians. He proposed in *The Power of Kiowa Song* (1998), "Knowledge is what makes sound meaningful; to *know* a song is to know its meaning. To know a song's meaning, in turn, is to know its power—that which inspires, uplifts, and edifies" (Lassiter, 141).

Would this notion of meaning and power in books and songs resonate with singer/songwriters, Pete Kosky ('04) and Colleen Anderson ('03) and also Michael Tierney (a self-proclaimed Humanities Program groupie)? In this issue and the Spring 2013 issue of *Graduate Humanities (GH)*, we decided to interview Pete, Colleen, Michael and Dr. Lassiter to find out how they think about the music they either study or make as singers and songwriters. A summary of the first two interviews follows. You can listen online to longer excerpts and songs mentioned in the interviews at [www.marshall.edu/humn](http://www.marshall.edu/humn) starting in January, 2013.

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### Singing & Songwriting with Pete Kosky, '04

GH: One of our program quests is to address the oft-repeated question, "What can you do with a Humanities degree?" So, Pete, as a high-school history teacher and a recorded singer/songwriter, what value did you find in having a Masters in Humanities?

PK: It's what you want to get out of it—I needed a Master's degree for my teaching certification but it was a very enriching experience. My emphasis was on historical studies and I was learning more about history, which I teach. My final project included recording a collection of songs that I wrote about the Allegheny Frontier.

GH: What does singing and songwriting mean to you?

PK: It's just something that I do and it came very natural to me. I didn't always sing or write songs. My early influence of music was hearing Marty Robbins and Johnny Horton on records. Then we moved to West Virginia when I was six or seven and I heard the Morris brothers, David Morris from Clay County. I grew up camping with my Dad and we went to Muzzleloader rendezvous—I listened to my Dad and others talk and sing around the campfire. I also went to the Vandalia Gathering when it started in 1977. I've been to all those and that means something to me. Because of this exposure, I honed in early on traditional songs. See **Pete Kosky, Page 5**

## Singing & Songwriting with Colleen Anderson, '03



GH: Colleen, as the owner of Mother Wit Writing and Design Studio, as a recorded singer/songwriter, published author, poet, and essayist, what value did you find in having a Masters in Humanities?

CA: I had no illusion of a master's degree in Humanities increasing my income, although it may have made me a more credible workshop provider.

The real value was that it opened up my mind, enriched me with new things to explore.

GH: What does singing and songwriting mean to you?

CA: Music and song are powerful. Song has the capacity to move people in a way that just talking to them might not. I don't think it's absolutely necessary for a song to have words to be very moving. There's a lot of wonderful music without words that just makes me cry and it's obviously not the words.

GH: Do you write music without words?

CA: No, because I don't play any instrument. I played piano when I was a child and I have this built-in knowledge of what a song sounds like. I know that when I write a song, I hear it in its wholeness. And then I have to get together with this wonderful guitar

player, George Castelle, and go through this laborious process of him playing a chord and saying, "Is this it?" and I say "No" or "Yes." He often knows exactly what it is I am hearing—but if he doesn't, I tell him because I can hear it. I can sometimes hear things that are a lot more complex than I can describe.

GH: What are the contexts for songs that you write?

CA: A lot of my songs come out being infatuated with somebody—and that's pretty fruitful as a songwriting stimulus. But many of them have to do with geography, plants and animals. And it's getting more that way as the sexual love gets less and the beauty of the land means more. I just wrote a song, "A Trail Through the Trees," that's like a botany book, and people seem to like it. As I get older a lot of my songs have reference to death in them—I don't know what that's about other than I'm going to die.

GH: Some songs are all about problems and yours aren't.

CA: No, every now and then someone will react to me and think I'm such a sweet, nice person—and I'm not; I'm just as mean and flawed as any human being and I wish there was some creative part of me that could express all of that . . . but so far I haven't found it. I just keep writing sappy songs and I just wrote a sappy book, *Missing: Miss Cornflower*. Maybe it's an unconscious editing process that when I leave this world, what I want to leave behind is that sweet, kind person. See *Colleen Anderson* page 4

## Farewell to Fran

by Carolyn Quinlan, Administrative Secretary, Sr. and a current student in the program. Photos courtesy of Bill Kroesser.



Jeanette Ahangardezfooli ('10) thanks Dr. Simone for her fine teaching and mentoring.



Dr. Frances "Fran" Simone

On August 31, 2012, the Graduate Humanities Program celebrated the retirement of one of our faculty members. The event was hosted by Dr. Luke "Eric" Lassiter and his wife Dr. Elizabeth "Beth" Campbell. A great time was had by all. It was one of those "special" events when a group of people who share similar interests could join together and appreciate one's company. As old friends reunited, new friendships formed. Everyone brought their favorite "pot luck" dish and many shared memorable stories as students and friends of Dr. Frances "Fran" Simone. We love you Fran, and wish you the very best.

# Spring 2013 Seminars

See our website – [www.marshall.edu/humn](http://www.marshall.edu/humn) – for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.

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**A&S 501 – Studies in Non-Western Art & Music (Luke Eric Lassiter), Thursday, 7:00 – 9:50 p.m.** Studies emphasizing non-Western art or music. This seminar will explore the various dimensions of art and music ethnographically, as well as examine the role of art and music in people’s lives everywhere as a cross-cultural phenomenon. *Dr. Lassiter, director of the Graduate Humanities Program and professor of humanities and anthropology, has written extensively in several books and essays on the relationship of encounter, experience and story, especially as they relate to issues of belief and worldview, language and culture, memory and identity.*

**CULS 612 – Time & Place in Appalachia (Bob Maslowski), Tuesday, 7:00 – 9:50 p.m.** This interdisciplinary course orients students to the importance of geography, topography, and geology to the history and development of the Appalachian region. *Dr. Robert Maslowski, retired Archeologist for the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, possesses extensive knowledge of Appalachian archeology, culture, and history. He was executive producer of three award winning films, Ghosts of Green Bottom, Red Salt & Reynolds, and Secrets of the Valley. His numerous publications have appeared in venues such as World Archaeology, National Geographic Society Research Reports, Pennsylvania Archaeologist, Wonderful West Virginia, and West Virginia Archeologist (which he also serves as Editor).*

**HUMN 605 – Western Traditions & Contemporary Cultures (Anne McConnell), Monday, 7:00 – 9:50 p.m.** Using primary materials from different cultural periods, as well as contemporary critical analysis, this core course explores epistemological questions that underlie conflicts between cultures. *Dr. Anne McConnell teaches world literature, critical*

*theory, and writing in the English Department at West Virginia State University. She recently published Approaching Disappearance at Dalkey Archive Press; the book explores the work of Maurice Blanchot, Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka, and Nathalie Sarraute.*

**HUMN 650 – Selected Topics as independent study arranged between instructor and student (contact Director to arrange course).** For students who need to conduct independent research and/or reading in a specific topic in the humanities, the Program will offer independent studies in those topics as funds allow. Contact the Director for more information. Examples of Special Topics might include: Film Criticism, Museum Studies, Studies in Appalachian Music, Studies in Poetry, Language and Communication.

**HUMN 680 – Independent Research Symposium (Luke Eric Lassiter), Arranged.** A pro-seminar required of all Humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project. Arranged with the Program Director.

**LITS 600 – SpTp: Writing Creative Nonfiction: Focus on the Personal Essay (Cathy Pleska), Wednesday, 7 – 9:50 p.m.** You may be familiar with the personal essay; that is, a genre of writing that uses the “I” as the center to explore inner and outer worlds vis experience and memory. Did you know the personal essay comes in many flavors, such as memoir essay, nature, travel, and radio, to name a few? In this course we will study models in each of four sub-genres and then write and workshop the essays. Expect field trips! *Ms. Pleska teaches writing at West Virginia State University, where she is also the Director of the WVU Writing Center. She earned her MFA in creative nonfiction writing at Goucher College in Baltimore and is an essayist for West Virginia Public Radio.*

“By culture, I refer to the collection of shared, loosely connected, taken-for-granted rules, symbols, and beliefs that characterize a people. That culture is declared, sustained, and enforced by what sociologists call institutions, such as family, law, arts, and religion. By national character, I refer to ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that individuals typically share with others in their nation. A central feature of American culture and character is *volunteerism*.

“The first key element of volunteerism is believing and behaving *as if* each person is a sovereign individual: unique, independent, self-reliant, self-governing, and ultimately self-responsible. The second key element of volunteerism is believing and behaving *as if* individuals succeed through fellowship—not in egoistic isolation but in sustaining, voluntary communities.”

*Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* by Claude S. Fischer

## Colleen Anderson Continued from Page 2

GH: “Sappy” kind of dismisses what people hear in your songs.

CA: I don’t have a problem with being sentimental. I have a problem with being light or trite—but to make people feel or to feel deeply, I would never apologize for that. I’d like people to experience something positive—either to get a good laugh or feel spiritually uplifted. One of the great purposes of art is to comfort people. It seems to me that art can raise questions, make you uncomfortable. My art falls into the category of giving solace. My songs are grounded in the world—life as it seems to me at the moment. In general, I hope people feel more uplifted than not. I hope to relay the message that the earth is sacred. And that community is sacred, or at least, that community is a good thing.

GH: Tell us about your song, “West Virginia Chose Me.”

CA: I actually dreamed the chorus, harmonies, and words and woke up with it in my head. That song was written about 1990 after I’d been here 20 years.

I came here as a VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) in 1970 to work with Cabin Creek Quilts. West Virginia now feels like a relative, like a part of my family that I don’t have any control of whether or not we’re together—we’re family.

GH: Tell us more about the words of your songs.

CA: My songs are fiction—based on things that happened to me or that I wished had happened to me. A lot of times you give up the truth in order to make it a better story. In the song, “Old Time Music,” I didn’t have a granddad, but I wanted to write a song about a fiddle player and get across the idea that music can take you to some place good. And who knows, maybe I had some ulterior motive about giving myself a granddad? It’s all personal. Even the made-up stories come out of a well of the interior.

Songwriting and short essay are just two favorite writing forms. I just adore them both. They are demanding forms because they are short. In the case of a song, it’s metrical, it rhymes, it’s a combination of melody and words—a lot of puzzle pieces to fit together that are absolutely fascinating. Brevity can seem easy and light but when done well it has a tremendous emotional capacity. Because of limits, song has the capacity to catch you unaware . . . it’s

almost like there’s an equation that the simplicity and limitation are inverse to the emotional power that it could have. I love to explore that equation.

I also love to practice and perform with others. If I’m lucky, I’ll get Julie Adams to sing my song. She will change the melody somehow or put the accent on a different word and so often I find the song grows as you perform it. And sometimes even the meaning grows as you perform it and you realize, “Oh, yeah, that’s what that was about.” Sometimes I figure out simpler ways to say the word—to make the words come out of my mouth easier. It’s an editing process.

Singing and songwriting is the greatest bonus to me because I never intended to do it. Sometimes when I’m in front of an audience and people are listening and I’m singing and breathing and doing this thing and the center of attention . . . I’m thinking, “How did I get here?” Singing for me is all gravy. I don’t feel the need to get famous. I have no expectation of it bringing me wealth or fame. I just love to do it. Even when I rehearse, I feel so good afterwards. It’s just fun to sing. I think everybody should sing whether or not they have a good voice.

## What’s Happening Elsewhere?



At lunch time on April 19, Dr. Graham Crow, Deputy Director of the National Centre for Research Methods at the University of Southampton and colleague, Dr. Rose Wiles, Co-Director, engaged students and faculty on the South Charleston campus in a discussion of new research methods

being developed in England. These methods are characterized by being “about people, by the people, and for the people” — processes that democratizes social research by inviting the subjects (individuals and communities) to participate in designing and implementing the research. The National Centre for Research Methods provides a strategic focal point for identifying, developing, and delivering integrated research, training, and capacity-building programs. This community-based collaborative research has both quantitative and qualitative aspects that tend to be more relevant and result in better quality data than older methodologies. Dr. Lassiter traveled to the U.K. earlier in the year where he met with Dr. Crow, attended conferences and symposia, delivered talks, and planned future collaborations relating to collaborative research methods in the U.S. & U.K.

**Pete Kosky** continued from Page 1

When I started writing songs, I already had templates in my head of the ballad format. Ballads are stories told in song, usually a third person narrative, with no chorus. I listen to good songwriters but I get more inspiration from traditional music—I also play the claw hammer banjo so I know a lot of fiddle tunes. All those melodies and the narrative style of the balladry goes through my head and that's how it comes out in my songwriting a lot of the time.

GH: Do you write the tunes and then the lyrics?

PK: Ninety-five percent of the time the melody and lyrics come at the same time, like the rose and the thorn. Usually I feel distracted all day and then in the evening I get out my guitar and it'll all come out, like a birthing process. In 15 or 20 or 30 minutes it's all done. It's very quick. Some sort of inspiration and bang, it's all out there. It's almost like the songs are already written and you just tune in to them somehow and you channel them and you got them.

GH: What's different about your music?

PK: It's honest. I'm not going to play a song unless it's good and I work to make them good. I get disconnected with my songs—I like the process of writing them more than anything else and after I write them I kind of lose interest. That's why I record them because I know I'm not going to be singing them. Paradoxically, the marketing part turns me off. I lose interest because I just want to play and enjoy myself—passing on songs to someone else or just sitting on the porch playing banjo.

GH: Tell us more about what you mean by "traditional music."

PK: There's a lot of tunes that are traditional that everybody just learns. They are played all over the country. There are several layers of tunes that are fiddle tunes played on the banjo. Some come from the British Isles and are very old. Some came out of Ireland, the Civil War, Stephen Foster days, Radio Days, Depression songs—they are part of the repertoire. West Virginia has

another layer of tunes that are just from West Virginia. Tunes like "Yew Piney Mountain." There are certain fiddle families, mostly from central West Virginia that tunes are associated with. It's special when you're just with West Virginia people.

The songs are passed down from person to person and you have to sit down and learn it—that's the delicate part—it's a line of communication and if people quit teaching or quit learning, songs will die. West Virginia, more than any other state, has a tradition of living music.

GH: How did this living music happen?

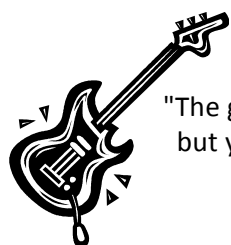
PK: It happened because of the cultural isolation of the mountainous geography and people had to make their own music. And also, it's the love of music. It's an intoxicating thing. It's fun and really neat. To me it's second nature.

GH: Tell us about these words, "There's a bond like no other that I've known / When our hearts all beat together to the music that's so old," from your song "My Family."

PK: "My Family" is about the people who play traditional music. I can take my guitar and go up to people playing a tune with a fiddle and banjo and I've not played it before, but I can play with them. I figure the key out and—that's one way that happens. And another is that, for the most part, everybody knows all the tunes, they know who they learned them from, and they play them together. They're passing music on and sharing it with people. The song is just a way of saying that, I guess.

GH: What is it you want your audience to experience when they hear your music?

PK: I'd like folks to "see" a place. "Winter Afternoon" is like that. And "Poetry That Makes Me Cry" is a beautiful sentiment versus singing about someone getting killed. I'd like folks to see things the way I do and hope they can relate. I'm not an activist. I just like to tell stories and I hope people enjoy them.



"The guitar's all very well, John,  
but you'll never make a living out of it."

*John Lennon's Aunt Mimi*


## Recent Graduate

**Jennifer Jo Dooley. Cultural/Historical Studies. Project Title: "The Underside of Bridges: One Asperger Perspective."**



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**Come Visit Us**  
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**WV Book Festival**  
**October 12 – 14, 2012**  
**Charleston Civic Center**

A large, colorful banner with a distressed, hand-painted border. The background is divided into horizontal bands of green, orange, and red. The text "Graduate Humanities" is written in large white letters across the orange band. Below this, on the left, is the Marshall University logo (a green 'M' with 'MARSHALL' written across it). To the right of the logo is a red-bordered box containing the text "students and faculty collaboratively exploring the arts, history, culture, and literature in an open experimental multidisciplinary environment". At the bottom right of the banner, the text "Volume 35 Issue 2 Fall 2012" is written in white.

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