

High Tech work required a lot of daily driving wherever I was, but the Salt Lake area had gained over a million more people, and was getting ready to host the Olympic Games, so the roads were all under construction. I put at least a hundred miles per day on my car while getting to know the city again.

The old Cosmic Aeroplane may be gone, but vibrant replacements keep things creative. Former Cosmic partner Ken Sanders hosts readings by activist authors and poets in his bookstore. Another former Cosmic staffer, Brad Collins, runs Raunch Records. Cosmic descendant Blue Boutique still breeds Utahns. My volunteer station KRCL thrives by playing New Age, World Music, Punk, Blues, Funk, and Soul. The Heavy Metal Shop became nationally famous among road acts. SLUG Magazine covers local music and lifestyles, celebrating Utah's *Pride* festival and *Craft Lake City*. My patient editor, Angela Brown, also worked at Salt City CDs where P-Funk's formerly rare recordings were on sale in the bins. Angie is now SLUG's publisher.



One day, while I was taking an afternoon jog from my house on Capitol Hill, I saw that my costume-making neighbor Ms. Cobus was having a yard sale. A local collective called *Street Legal Theater* was looking for bargains, and Amber Merriwhether was improvising a traffic-stopping fashion show as she mixed and matched outfits from Cobus' racks and boxes. She was still going at it when I returned from my run - her combination of furry pillbox hat and polka-dotted coat was particularly hilarious, and I immediately drew some sketches so I wouldn't forget.

We met again at *Club Axis*, where she tended bar, (see Angela Brown's photo above, autographed by Amber,) and I gave her one of my drawings. *Street Legal Theater* did outrageous animations throughout the city. Fire, stilts, satire, and sexual taboos were the company's stock in trade, and Amber was the *Hoop Queen*. They eagerly worked towards their annual performance at *Burning Man* in September.

Because of them, I saw some amazing events, including a performance by New York's *Bindlestiff Family Cirkus*, enroute to the East Coast after appearing at *Burning Man* in Nevada during 1999. Besides musician Sxip Shirley and stuntman Rocket Johnny, the Bindlestiffs also went through the heavy labor of bringing a BOOKSTORE on their journey. A sword-dancer named *Princess* oversaw sales while *Cirkus* madness ensued onstage. Stephanie (*Ringmistress Philomena*) Monseu and Keith (*Kinko & Pennygaff*) Nelson spit fire, cracked whips, threw knives, did magic, juggled, and spun plates in certain ways that I never expected to see!

I spoke with them afterward and learned that Hovey Burgess was on their Board of Directors, We have stayed in touch for over twenty years. They are exemplars of true foolery, and their mission is: *Keeping the Variety Arts Alive!* They sponsored monthly shows at Dixon Place in NYC for many years. I met a lady at one of Katie's performances in Amsterdam during 2012, who was actually at one of those gigs earlier that same year, as one of the *Good to Go Girls*, miming an Esther Williams-style aquacade with their faces in separate bowls of water, instead of swimming in a pool.

The Bindlestiffs also produced a weekly variety gala via Internet during the Covid 19 pandemic that helped dozens of performers pay their rent every month, and treated the world to Hovey Burgess' scholarship about Circus History. When Salt Lake City attempted an outdoor *Buskers Fest* on Main Street in the summer of 2021, I was taking photos and writing about it for the *West View* newspaper, and many invited performers were well-acquainted with Keith and Stephanie!