

# Waldman Chants Power & Energy

by Louise Billotte

**S**he is quite simply one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. She is Anne Waldman. She is poet, administrator, teacher and star. She has that kind of energy -- movie star energy. She's powerful and she knows how to use that power. She's also intelligent and knows how to use that intelligence. It's her intelligence that sets her apart.

She lives these days in a room on the top floor of the Boulderado Hotel in Boulder, Colorado. It's a tacky, funky room with a splendid view of the mountains. It is also a very elegant, very personal room. Waldman has a touch. Even her poems look pretty on the page. She says she wishes these days she could take that room with her wherever she goes.

At 11 o'clock one morning three journalists come to interview Anne. We are three feminists, three practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism come to interview a woman who is important to us not just professionally. We begin at 11 and it is after three by the time we leave. We are exhausted but exhilarated. The next day I hear that Waldman has had to cancel an appointment for still another interview. She is all talked out.

Only a few days earlier, at a reading I missed, Anne read a poem that was not too well received. The poem is about a "Shaman," meant to be Bob Dylan. The poem, she says, has been giving her problems. She can't work with it on the page, she needs to keep reading it aloud.

Much of the criticism of the work is directed at her use of the word Shaman with regards to Dylan. But... "shaman just covers a lot of ground," she explains. It covers all the performers, it covers anybody who's in the spotlight, anybody who's putting out energy." It's an ancient idea, she adds, and is probably a concept that will lead us into getting back more deeply into language.

I mention how a number of poets these days are working with the idea of poet as shaman, and how the idea goes counter to the Western notion of art as self-expression.

"I have a whole thing about that," says Anne, "that the poets are shamans and... especially if they can be spontaneous, they're feeding off the audience. Whoever's in the room is as important as who's on stage, the speaker has got to pick up on that energy, be an instrument, even if the audience is speaking things too, or shouting out things, like in a gospel situation... when you have one person who's in touch with the spirit in some sense but is also invisible, I mean not laying his or her particular trip on you." The poet has the gift of language, but it is essentially an impersonal or transpersonal gift.

The Shaman poem came out of the Rolling Thunder tour, with which Anne travelled and worked for a time, and which was, according to her, "a very tribal situation, with Dylan in charge and being like the king and the shaman and the person who was making it all happen."

Because Anne was part of Rolling Thunder, because her work is so musical, because she's such a great performer, it seems she might want to work someday with a band.

"I've worked with musicians," she says, "but I believe that I can do it all with my own voice, that the poets' instrument is built into their voice." Working with musicians she says "... was fun. Fun! But I can't see doing it now. If it comes up, fine, but I'm not just gonna go out and do it, I'm not hungry for it."

The musicians on the tour were always suggesting she work with a band, and Joni Mitchell gave her a dulcimer to use with her poetry. "I like doing it by myself in this room," she laughs.

Of Dylan, she says, "I'm really interested in his work, his performing, etc. mostly because of the words. I can always hear the words, whereas with so many other performers, singers, you can't. His words are very good. His music is very good too."

If Dylan is shaman, Waldman is shaman-ess and the long chant poems she has been

reading for the past couple of years are nothing less than exorcism rites. "Fast Speaking Woman," the best known of them, grew out of an encounter with an Indian shamaness in Mexico.

The chant poems are power poems. They name, evoke, absolve. Language has power. Anne says she is working a lot with language and sound these days, less with meaning and message.

"Words, if you're working on the printed page, are almost illuminated. They can be like illuminated manuscripts and they have this power which just lifts up off the page. In sound it's like mantra, or just high sound which has an incredible life of its own. I was reading somewhere that mantras have been recorded through something called a tonoscope and that they appear, the visual patterns of the sounds, as Yantra (a visual pattern)! So you're getting this incredible thing both ways. It's so obvious that would be the case, that this mystical sound has this mystical pattern too... has this thing of waking you up... totally. I think often Dylan can do that when he is really on."

Much of the power of language, she thinks, comes from the power of naming. She talks about how members of certain tribes have secret names "which you don't want anybody to get because when they get that they get your soul." The power of naming and the power of sound together can have a totally liberating effect.

No matter what we are discussing, we are always talking about energy, about the energy of people, situations, experiences. Anne Waldman is a very high voltage lady who is in touch with her phenomenal energy and works constantly on directing it. For several years she has been a student of Tibetan Buddhism. Her so-called "root" teacher (her guru) is in India; in America she works with Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of Naropa Institute, who she considers to be a living em-



Poet Anne Waldman in Boulder

bodiment of the Dhamra. She is working at Naropa now, running the poetics school, because Trungpa feels that is the best place for her to be.

Her spiritual practice consists of sitting meditation and also prostrations (to the mental image of her Teacher). "It makes sense to prostrate to the guru," she feels, "because that guru is inspiring in terms of one's own mind. Maybe that's cheating. But my root teacher is an inspiration, an embodiment of a really great place to be... He's an embodiment of my total mind."

For Anne, Buddhism is a very applicable, generalizable way of relating to the world. "Buddhism is about refining life, as is art. Trungpa Rinpoche is like a doctor coming into this situation in this country that has gotten so out of hand, so sick, so neurotic... this incredible suffering people are not willing to face. I mean the first Noble Truth has yet to enter the American consciousness." The first Noble Truth, according to the teachings of the Buddha, is the inescapable, unavoidable fact of suffering. "No Way Out," Waldman says in one of her long chant poems. "But you don't necessarily need this Buddhism to show you that things are self evident. There are teach-

ings everywhere in every situation. That's what Buddhism is all about."

The Buddhist tradition Waldman is a part of is a Tantric tradition. Tantra is about energy. It is also about devotion to a master. Tantric masters discourage the use of drugs. Waldman has in the past been heavily into drugs and has written a lot about them. Is she using drugs now? What are her feelings about them?"

"Tantra practice emphasizes a steadier use of one's creative energies than drugs can give. But drugs are definitely an energy source." She is doing drugs less. "Drugs are such an individual trip. I'm not interested anymore in that kind of individual high where you're like a god then you become nothing but it's all your ego that's going through this."

Someone points out that meditation is also a very individual high, but Anne protests that it's more sustained, you don't cling to it. "I always used to cling to various drug experiences, you know, that's the high I've got to get back to."

Nevertheless, she thinks drugs are a fantastic way of learning about oneself. They are still useful to her, but no longer essential. She also distinguished between drugs. Peyote and mushrooms are an extension of food. "Acid's not food but it's really good. But there's a point when you have to have some other kind of practice going. And meditation and drugs are working with the same kinds of energies."

In addition to her writing, Anne still directs, long distance, the Poetry Project in New York. She is also teaching at Naropa. She is one of the few women at

Naropa with an important administrative position, and she feels, as do other women at Naropa, that there is a strong anti-woman bias, particularly from the administration. Also, so many of the men, both in the poetry scene and in the administration, are gay men. Anne says she finds that less of a problem than being dominated by straight male energy. Besides, so many of the gay men at Naropa, like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, are her friends. She doesn't feel uncomfortable to be the only woman among them. In fact, she says, she feels honored.

"I'm so much younger compared to those guys. Burroughs is in his sixties. Allen is fifty... I feel in that situation like a 'younger poet' rather than like a 'young woman.'"

Nevertheless, Waldman says that in her teaching she is more interested in working with women. "I'm finding that the women in the writing classes are doing more interesting stuff, so from my point of view, as far as the whole poetry scene here goes, there's no problem. The students are as important in the situation as the faculty."

Still, she wishes more women would show up and demand responsibility, though she acknowledges how much more difficult it is for women. "The women have to work harder to present themselves. The guys are just kind of there... it's like they're a given. But there are an awful lot of powerful women around. There's an awful lot of potential. Women are just getting into their power." Anne Waldman knows about power.

## Celebrating The West's New Music

by A.P.

A gem of an idea born in Southern California early this year is being brought to polished fruition from San Diego to Vancouver -- but notably, at the risk of classic northern California chauvinism, in and around San Francisco. Named Music/West, its goal is to celebrate contemporary music of the West in an intensified series of concerts uniquely western in flavor and presentation.

In the Bay Area, representatives of some 25 performing, composing, academic and media groups, as well as individuals active in new music, began plans last spring for a concert series. It will take place in October, which has been designated New Music Month for the entire West Coast. The result is awesome -- well over 60 concerts of new music, at 30 sites from Aptos to Santa Rosa, in the eight weeks between September 22 and November 15.

A master calendar for the Bay Area shows the highly diverse patchwork of styles and pursuits characteristic of this area -- mainstream 20th Century to current avant garde, abstract to theatrical, instrumental to electronic, academic to highly experimental. Concerts will be given on university campuses, in churches, schools, museums and concert halls, large and small.

The idea first took shape in Los Angeles, where Roger Reynolds, Leonard Stein and Dorrance Stalvey were gnashing their chops over the International Society of Contemporary Music concert in Boston, which has programmed only music by Northeast composers. They wanted to demonstrate the richness of new music performance here on the West Coast.

They want to establish a consortium of performing centers and/or ensembles for the regular performance of new music in the West. They hope to focus national and international recognition on musical activities in the western United States and to attract funding for such activities. They also want to lay the foundation for an on-going support system and communication network for groups, individuals and concert series devoted to contemporary music in the West.

The plan was communicated to composer and UC Berkeley professor Richard Felciano, who called together representatives of several new music groups in April to implement Bay Area participation. Two months later another meeting was held, with a broader attendance of representatives and individuals.

At that meeting, a committee of three

was named to replace Felciano, who began a leave of absence in July. Composer Janice Giteck, San Francisco Conservatory of Music faculty member Joan Gallegos, and Conservatory teacher and composer Elinor Armer became the driving force for Music/West in the Bay Area.

The plan broke down further into a three-stage project. The first step was to collect material from each group on its history, philosophy, special emphases, and a sample of typical programming. A booklet is being prepared for national and international distribution containing the information gathered, as well as material about the rest of the plan.

The second stage was the planning for New Music Month -- musical activities as they have continued to take place in the West for years accurately presented in a concentrated program. Attempts were made to avoid date conflicts for New Music Month within the Bay Area. But it was decided, after much discussion, by unanimous voice vote to let the calendar stand as is, since the multiplicity of events is truly representative of this area, and there will be ample opportunity for each group to be heard in spite of repeats or overlaps.

The third stage was to be the festival. This stage, to be funded by city, county, state and national grants, would be a festival in one location with representative groups coming together in a culmination of the sequence. A committee including representatives of each area will decide general plan and procedure; repertoire will be selected from nominations rather than from solicitation. That this could become an annual event, beginning in 1977, is an attractive possibility.

The First Annual Fall New Music Festival of Music West/San Francisco Bay Area opens Wednesday, September 22 and runs through Monday, November 15. Low-priced concerts will take place all over the Bay Area.

A master calendar for Music/West was released in early September, listing dates, places and participants not only for the Bay Area series, but also for those concerts taking place in San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Portland and Seattle. To obtain a copy of the master calendar, send a self-addressed stamped legal size envelope to Music/West, 239 Cambridge Avenue, Kensington 94708.

And the September issue of Ear magazine will be devoted to the Bay Area New Music Festival. A year's subscription to Ear, at six dollars, is available from Charles Shere, editor, Ear, 1824 Curtis Street, Berkeley, CA 94702.