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Transcribed by: Jacob Honigman

JACOB HONIGMAN:

Okay. It is October 29<sup>th</sup>. I am here with Mary [Carpenter] and Pook [Barbara Pfaffe] and they are going to tell us their stories. So first, whichever one of you wants to start feel free to tell me a little about the background and how you got involved in the LGBT community in St. Louis and we can move on from there.

MARY CARPENTER:

I got involved in the LGBT community in St. Louis when I came out [laughs] which was in the late seventies. Promptly met, well actually met a lot of incredible people in the gay community. Two of whom, Connie Lane and Barbara Lau, with myself, were the founding mothers of Wired Women. And it totally began...an unplanned thing that kind of emerged out of, St. Louis had a, I guess, strong feminist, how would you say, presence at the time. There had been things like \_Take Back The Night March\_ against rape, that was in Benton Park. There was a bike event for the Equal Rights Amendment in Forest Park. [coughs] And Harriet Woods was a state politician from St. Louis running, so I think the Wired Women came out of that feminism of people wanting to...at that time bars were mostly the places to network and meet up with other LGBT people and we weren't settling for that. We wanted to---

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Because there were men, they were male bars mostly

MARY CARPENTER:

Exactly. And--

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Or, if you don't mind if I step in. In my experience, well I came out in the seventies too and I worked for a theatre group in town called Theatre Project Company and that's where I met Connie and Barbara. I was a technician, theatre technician, and an actor and we met during a play. And in my experience, there wasn't safe space for women to gather. Bar wise. Because there were some women's bars but they were really rough and really scary. You know, it would be lots of...we called them diesel dykes. They were rough and you'd walk in and go right back out because it was kinda scary. And Connie and Barbara and Mary were trying to create safe space where women could gather and drink and eat and dance safely, you know safely. And you know, it went from there.

MARY CARPENTER:

It started not us setting out to do that so much. We did want to have some events, some social events mostly. I was a music fanatic, I had lots of records and I was a closet DJ I suppose at the time, whereas the other two were more, they were really into theatre and production. Barbara, who was a WashU alum, she was from Cleveland, Ohio. She moved here to go to WashU. She was Assistant Curator for Folk Art at the Jefferson Expansion Memorial Historical Association at the arch. So she was really into folklife stuff.

Eventually, later on, she left St. Louis to work as program coordinator for the Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife. So, and then Connie was working with the Theatre Project Company. So they had a lot of production skills and things like that, so we--

BARBARA PFAFFE:

That's where the Wired came from.

MARY CARPENTER:

Right. Exactly. Yes. So they, you know, we all were on the same page in that we all liked a sense of community and it basically started by us requesting from the bar that lesbians were frequently frequenting. At that time Genesis Two, now the site of Jiffy Lube in the Grove [laughs] and going to them because we were really frustrated. We'd go there, there would be mostly gay men DJing and it would be, you know music is pretty personal, but it would be a lot of instrumental like "buh buh buh", that kind of music. Which we--

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Pounding.

MARY CARPENTER:

I called, in my narrative we had a name for it so you'll see that. (00:05:00:00)

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Oh you're not going to say it? [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

Cock rock is what we called it. [laughs] And we, for example, we wanted some women's energy. We wanted some slow dances. There were some good, you know, songs like My Girl and Sexual Healing and things like that. Not "boom boom boom let's go back to my room", which was a big gay men's song at that time. So that's how it started, we were denied an opportunity, we had an idea that hey, maybe on a certain night we could come in here, bring some records, and spin records, and have a women's night. They didn't buy that.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

They said no. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

Connie and Barbara had some [cough] connections with Heartbreak Hotel, some of the folks down there. So that's kinda how it started. We had a one time event, Sister Solstice Strut, in June 1983 and that bar is just south of Busch Stadium, downtown. It turned out there were 34 women showed up. [to Barbara] Were you at that first--?

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Yeah!

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah you were, you were. Called it the Sister Solstice Strut--

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Because it was summer solstice.

MARY CARPENTER:

Yes, and we rented equipment from a place on South Jefferson, schlepped it over there, and we cleared sixteen—And I think there were thirty, I want to say thirty something people there, thirty four people. We cleared sixteen dollars and some change. But the great, there's great energy there, we got a lot of encouragement, we schlepped all these records down there, those old wooden crates that you'd use for vinyl. I guess the best thing, the crowds—so what happened was it was supposed to be a one time event and in September of that year the owners of Heartbreak said “let's have every other Thursday night” so from September 1983 till end of that year we had dances every Thursday night.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

And in those days, the Thursday was significant. Thursday was the queer day--

MARY CARPENTER:

Queer day, it was supposed to be queer, especially if you wore—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Green and yellow. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

Green, yes. Our mantra was that women's night was not the same as ladies' night [cough]. And so I think that pretty much says it all. So that's kind of how it started. I noted in my narrative that there was a production company called Red Tomato. Some St. Louis folks who was producing some concerts which featured lesbian artists. And they were kind of phasing out at that time. But because we started doing these events, and I think, it was probably a dollar fifty admission for the first one. Here's the flyer from when dances started in September so every other Thursday. And then in 1985 we started having weekly dances because the guy at Heartbreak said “when you're not here, on the Thursdays you're not here, women are coming down here anyways looking for you guys.” So he said “let's just do it”, so we did. So then we started to accumulate some revenue, mailing lists grew to over 800 quickly. We joke about it was your neighborhood too, but the 63110 zip code in St. Louis which is near the Shaw neighborhood was referred to as—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Dyke Heights!

MARY CARPENTER:

Dyke Heights. Because that's where probably ninety percent of our mailing lists, well maybe not ninety but a good percentage of them, lived in that neighborhood. I think—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Safe neighborhood, cheap rent.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah, there we go. And I think was happening to St. Louis along the feminist lines, there were a lot of people coming out, my generation. And there were a lot of women that moved here from other cities to go to college here. Either WashU or Webster College at the time, now it's Webster University, which was a very liberal fine arts schools. A very liberal liberal arts school [laughs]. So I think when, it was the synergy of the locals and the feminist, educated, intelligent women who could get things done. It was kind of the perfect, ya know, perfect storm.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
The perfect blend I think in some ways.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Yeah, yeah.

MARY CARPENTER:  
And there were some lesbian bars that emerged but not really. Not many. And so we had quite a following for quite a while. It was kinda like the Little Rascals, started making money and like what are we gonna do with it? Well let's put on a play because Connie Lane was a director and—(00:10:00:00)

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Well one of them...Kate Clinton was first though, before the play—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah, yeah

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[unintelligible] start getting the money going. It was still at Heartbreak Hotel that they decided to bring Kate Clinton, who was a fairly [coughs] established already, comedian. Stand-up comic.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Actually, the play was first.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Was it really?

MARY CARPENTER:

The play was April, 1984.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I am so sorry.

MARY CARPENTER

And Kate was in May so it was right around the same time.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I'm sorry. That's right, because the whole cast was at the Heartbreak Hotel after the closing, I'm sorry. Bluefish Cove was first.

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah so I'll shoot that over to...Pook because she was one of the stars.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove was a play written a lesbian resort in the Northeast. And it was written by Jane Chambers. And we performed it in one of the small theatre spaces downstairs of Webster. Everybody's story was in it, it was really well written. And quite explicit. It was a little...about half of the women didn't use their real names in the program. There was hate mail and murder threats and it was little scary on opening night to walk out there and know you were gonna do something on stage that might offend someone but it was a beautifully written play and everybody cried at the end because the lead, I was Lil the lead, and she dies of cancer. Elegantly. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

With a flair.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

With a flair! [laughs] yes! That generated a lot of attention I think, I don't know whether it was sold out every night but I believe it might have been. That's the money that she used to bring Kate in town—

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah, yeah

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I had that backwards.

MARY CARPENTER:

And also in the play, Joan Lipkin, I don't know if you've heard her name around town, but she's a—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Playwright, director

MARY CARPENTER:

The director of That Uppity Theatre Company. And the Disability Project. She was also in that play as well as—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

She was.

MARY CARPENTER:

About six or seven other locals.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Four couples so it was eight.

MARY CARPENTER:

Yes. Anyway, highly successful. But you know, the consistency of having something every week bringing in revenue. Even though it was only a dollar and a half or two bucks or something, we were able to fund that play. Start bringing Kate Clinton, one of the most notorious, I guess notable lesbian comics on a national tour. And also, we eventually were able to purchase our own sound equipment that we used for concerts with big Bose speakers that we schlepped all over the place and DJ equipment, you know turntables, everything. Eventually, when we converted over to CDs, we did that too. So that continued through 1985, or 1984, the weekly dances at Heartbreak. We had a couple shows down there also, on the stage. In January of 1985 we showed up with sound equipment to have a dance and there was a big barricade on the door that Heartbreak Hotel had closed. So keeping with its name, Heartbreak, we were heartbroken. Kinda had to shift gears as Wired Women did over the years. In April that year we were able to secure some space at the First Unitarian Church on Waterman to have some dances and they continued there for a couple years. Some other concerts were that year also at the Learning Center which was on Westminster. So there was almost a corridor through central St. Louis going downtown through the West End, that's kind of where we staked out, that area. We had some stuff at St. John's Church on Arsenal, some places in U City also. [coughs] So the First Unitarian Church was, gosh for almost four years as I'm looking through this list (00:15:00:00), was a pretty solid venue for us. We would typically, at that time, produce a couple concerts. Two or three concerts a year. The other kinda traditional thing was in June we would have a gay dance during Gay Pride Weekend and the proceeds from that dance would go to the Pride Committee. At the end of the narrative, and that was a standard with Wired Women—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

A lot of them were fundraisers. [unintelligible] I think almost always going to a needy group—

MARY CARPENTER:

And I alphabetized a list on the latest copy for you of the different groups that were the beneficiaries.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Women's shelters, HIV, that sort of thing.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Everything. Yeah, as a result of that, I have an old file of thank you notes and letters from different agencies and people, you know kind of gives you an idea. I'm really glad I kept those, you can look through those later. Here's your assignment, your next—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[laughs] yeah!

MARY CARPENTER:  
[laughs] Can we make jokes on this?

JACOB HONIGMAN:  
Yes. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Okay good. Yes, so—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[coughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Basically it was a pretty dynamic thing because—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Exciting!

MARY CARPENTER:  
We always had to adjust, we had no physical home, and that is the reason we were able to have such a long tenure. We didn't have overhead of an office, we all donated our services for mailings, a lot frequently at Pook's house in the Shaw neighborhood. On Flora Avenue where they have the—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Flora Place. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Flora Place. Where they have the Shaw Arts Fair every year, I always walk right by your old house.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Yeah.

MARY CARPENTER:

We typically had a core group of volunteers. We just called people, they'd show up, we'd do the mailings. Pook started creating all the artwork we have. I have a lot of that here too. Typically, flyers and things like that, through the years. Different dances and we had posters and stuff too that will be turned over to the museum. So one thing I want to mention is we did seek out some men's gay bars that allowed us to come in and have a women's night. Mitchly's, which was an incredible place down in Lafayette Square, at 1000 Mississippi. We had some outstanding dances there and later on at Nites, which was on Vandeventer and Twist which was another club downtown on Washington Avenue and that was later on. Around the same time, we were still using the Unitarian Church for dances, we secured the Sheldon Concert Hall on Washington Avenue [sic] and Grand Arts for some events. The concert production was increasing, almost as the dances were decreasing a little bit, but the concert and the event production was increasing with comics, musicians. There's a whole network of lesbian artists that, who was it, they all were on a record. Olivia Records was a lesbian record label.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Label.

MARY CARPENTER:  
A lot of their artists were on that tour and on that circuit. The Sheldon was another great opportunity and typically we kind of started this format, this tandem, of having a concert downstairs in the concert hall, which is nationally renown for its acoustics. It's acoustically perfect. And then--

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Built for organ recitals wasn't it.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Was it?

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I think so.

MARY CARPENTER:  
And then a dance upstairs following in their ballroom.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
There was a ballroom upstairs, it was perfect.

MARY CARPENTER:  
And that format became incredibly popular. All of our events were nonsmoking and—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
And had child care.

MARY CARPENTER:



Yeah, free child care and there were always interpreters for hearing impaired people. We were kind of cutting edge in that way and also the rave part. We kind of moved around a lot—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
You know, where are they now, where are they now? Michael Killoran, who was one of the founders of the Gateway Men's Chorus told me once that Gateway Men's Chorus (00:20:00:00) fully modeled themselves after Wired Women.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I didn't know that.

MARY CARPENTER:  
They would have concerts at the Sheldon and they would have dances upstairs afterwards. So that was really nice to hear.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
It was a great space because you had it all day moving in obviously and the whole ballroom could be decorated with whatever the season or the holiday was. Balloons dropping from the sky, or from the ceiling, or all that sort of thing. Which adds a dynamic to this—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah, so the amazing thing is that we all had day jobs. I was a high school guidance counselor at Affton High School, starting in 1985 and I was a varsity volleyball coach. I had a pretty full life, I was finishing my master's degree, I was in school a couple nights a week. We were young and energetic—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I worked at a print shop doing the graphics and burning plates and—

MARY CARPENTER:  
We all had, we were all gainfully employed. So we did this as a matter of passion and love and it was a lot of fun.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Gave us a print shop to print the stuff to. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah, there you go. Right.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[unintelligible] So we were using union shops—

MARY CARPENTER:

That's right. So in 1987, Barbara Lau left for DC and then in 1988 Connie Lane followed her and so we were again at a pivotal point where two of the three founders were gone.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Remember the First Night story that I told you earlier?

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah, what year—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I don't know what year it was, was it—

MARY CARPENTER:

It was later I think. Do you think it was in the nineties?

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Was it after they were gone? I think so.

MARY CARPENTER:

It was definitely after they had gone so—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I'll wait until you get there [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

I mean we don't have to go exactly—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

My mind sort of wanders, it's not chronological—

MARY CARPENTER:

Well we were always on the lookout for new places but the most events were at the Unitarian Church and the Sheldon. The Sheldon became our home and there were other places like Soulard Preservation Hall, places like that. The Sheldon was our home and I'm not sure what year it is, but St. Louis had started a New Year's Eve celebration called First Night. We can research and find out when that started but it posed a problem because we had booked the Sheldon. We always had a New Year's Eve dance, we booked the Sheldon for a New Year's Eve dance, the ballroom. Then we found out through the Sheldon folks that this First Night thing was happening and there was a conflict about it.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Well you would have had to buy a First Night ticket to get to the Sheldon because that's where First Night was on Grand and on Vandeventer. It was an outdoor gathering with food and music and—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Family events

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Family events! Family-oriented, yes, totally family oriented we thought, oh my goodness. Is this what Rose—?

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
My partner was a low level executive of AT&T—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Can you give her—?

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I don't know. I'll have to ask her. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
All right.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
She agreed to use her corporate abilities to go talk to the First Night people, who was the city? City Hall? It was the city that was doing it. I wasn't privy to any of the meetings so I don't know how she did it but she walked the walk and talked the talk and wore her suit. Her black Hillary Clinton. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Like a diplomat would.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Yes, yes and went to try and figure out how our people could make their way through the family-oriented event without having to buy two tickets, one to the Sheldon and one to First Night. They came up with a button that when you bought the ticket for the Sheldon, you got this button, that you would wear it and then you could walk through the gates, through the security gates, and get to the Sheldon. Well, when I came early and I went and talked to the people who were guarding, who were the security people at the gates, and gave him one of the buttons and said that our people were wearing them. And he knew about it but I wanted to be sure, our people. Well I wanted to be sure that everything was alright. So when people starting arriving at Sheldon I thought I'd walk over and make sure everything was going alright and I walked up to the same guy and I

said “is everything going alright? People coming and going?” And he said, “you know, I’m starting to recognize your people.” (00:25:00:00) [laughs] Which we thought was funny.

MARY CARPENTER:

Well not only that but the city ended up providing free bus shuttles for our patrons to the Sheldon. Well they had free shuttles and so our guests were able to—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

With the button they could get on the bus to it.

MARY CARPENTER:

The significance of it, the Sheldon’s concert hall downstairs got booked for one of the events because they had a combination of indoor and outdoor events. Immediately, the Sheldon was freaking out that oh my god we have this lesbian event right in the middle of this family thing, what’s going to, you know. But it all worked and actually Flowing, who wrote a really nice article about this whole evening, that lesbians were treated like royalty that night.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

It’s true. Out of our experience—

MARY CARPENTER:

But Barbara and Connie, you know when they left that was very significant because they had a lot of skills in production. They were able to parlay what they knew to plays, concerts, our dances, everything. Whereas I was kind of the main DJ for a while, and we had other DJs, but my interest was I just want to spin records—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Spin records—

MARY CARPENTER:

But it worked out great because we were providing something that the community needed and one of our early logos, you see like that. If you notice there’s two female ends on the electrical circuit like that. So kind of signifying, like Pook said, it wasn’t going to work—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Electrically, it won’t work.

MARY CARPENTER:

But that was kind of—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

That was the first one. The second one I turned them around so you could see [coughs] that they were female ends.

MARY CARPENTER:

The other thing during that era was, you know the gay bars tended to be in, not the safest parts of town. There was a lot of drinking and a lot of people would go to East St. Louis afterwards, there were clubs that were open until three. Women just didn't buy into that as much. We wanted some more cultural stuff, places to network, to talk. So when Connie and Barbara left, that was pretty heartbreaking for me because I was the one left behind as well as some others. But we decided to keep it going and initially, they asked that we not use the name Wired Women so we changed it to Wired Women Dance and we had...eventually they didn't end up doing anything with Wired Women anymore so they we just became Wired Women eventually. We actually even created our own magnet that I'm showing you. Every flyer we would produce after that we had a spot meant for people to put on their fridge.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Put your magnet here. [laughs] [coughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

We did rally and we started producing concerts again, expanding, gosh this is only the late eighties. I'm looking...and we're still using the Sheldon. We had some cabarets upstairs with some local talent, some performance artists, that's all on the list that you have. We kept it going, there we a lot of phases of Wired Women but we did keep it going and that was really great. So like I said, eventually the dances kind of gave way to more concert production. Also, the thing that was going on...and we did a comedy series, we did a land cruise comedy series. Have you seen our Facebook page yet?

JACOB HONIGMAN:

I have not.

MARY CARPENTER:

We have a Facebook page. If you just look that up, I try to post things, we've been posting things from time to time.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

There's digital versions of all of the paper stuff too if you require anything, posters or flyers or programs or the magnet or the tickets. I scanned and digitized everything, I've got it on file.

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah, but again we were able to keep it going because of the volunteer aspect. We did eventually, after Connie and Barbara left, we incorporated. We got 501©(3) non-profit status, and eventually down the road we applied and got funding from Regional Arts Commission. I think our first award was maybe \$5,000 a year or something like that? We are very, very proud to do that and to be acknowledged as an arts entity (00:30:00:00) in St. Louis. What kind of happened then, after we were in it for a few years, the core crowd that we had was getting older, going through some changes. We were trying to attract young lesbians. But the new generation of lesbians had Melissa Etheridge and the Indigo

Girls, some out performers and musicians and artists. So they didn't need Wired Women as much as the older crowd did. One of the things about being safe, I was a high school guidance counselor, so in the early years, in a program or something, it would just say Mary. I wouldn't use my name. Later on I said forget about it and didn't worry about it so much anymore. But you didn't know as a teacher, like I said I was a closet DJ. One time one of my colleagues was at one of the events and we looked at each other in shock. [laughs] And she came up to the stage of the Sheldon where I was DJing, and what do you say—?

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Right.

MARY CARPENTER:  
I say hey, I'm a closet DJ. [laughs] We became life-long friends after that.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I won't use a name but I am aware of what we called the most inappropriate exit from a lesbian dance when something like that happened to someone I knew who saw a work colleague across the room. She hadn't been spotted yet, they hadn't made eye contact yet. She actually went out the window and down the fire escape.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Oh my god, are you kidding me?

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I am not. [laughs] You do what you had to do.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Right? The Sheldon was a great venue and it kind of gave us, I guess a sense of professionalism, something. It was a nice venue, it was beautiful, gave us some status I suppose. But it did come with its issues. It didn't come with an elevator and we had to schlep heavy sound equipment up and down these steps. Some of it was stored at my house for a while over in the Tower Grove South neighborhood.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
And we carried people up the steps too?

MARY CARPENTER:  
We did, yeah. Sometimes, before there were elevators. It wasn't ADA accessible. And my neighbors, I think, though I had something going on because my neighbor finally said "what are you guys doing in the middle of the street at three in the morning unloading—?"

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
With large cases. [laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

It's okay, I'm a DJ. This is equipment. They thought I was in some chicanery or something I suppose. Even with trying to appease an older and a younger group, dance music was challenging because people have different comfort zones with music. Again, we were able to keep our costs down. Our mission was to get the money into the hands of the artists. That was how it was solved, how we set it up. So the way I see it, there are kind of three phases of Wired Women. From 1983 to 1988, when Connie, Barbara and I and Pook, kind of the main folks were there. After they left, there was kind of Wired Women Two which lasted until...and then Pook left in nineteen—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Ninety four.

MARY CARPENTER:

St. Louis in ninety four. The last event that my core group was involved in was 1999 at the Piper Palm House, Tower Grove Park. We had Teresa Trull and Barbara Hanby and then the last event was Pride Dance, June 27<sup>th</sup> of that year. Oh, that was earlier. Never mind. I was pretty worn out from thirteen years of Wired Women activities but in that last phase we went through another change trying to get younger women involved. We were approached by Contemporary Productions which was the ultimate production company in St. Louis, they did Mississippi Nights. That group now is what does the Pageant and Delmar Hall and all that. Can't remember the guys, Patrick Hagen and all them. (00:35:00:00) Mississippi Nights was a major music club down on the Landing. Down on the river where all the casinos are. Unfortunately, a lot of the culture down there now had turned to gambling. But Laclede's Landing was a major music entity in St. Louis. We worked with them, we brought Ani DiFranco who was a huge artist, Zap Mama with Edison Theatre here at Washington University. Then we did some stuff at Blueberry Hill's Duck Room. Some more folks, also we did Dar Williams and the [unintelligible] at Mississippi Nights. Some of our core folks didn't like that, that we were working with Contemporary [Production] as we had started out as a women's, lesbian organization. I think that the tide was changing and I was fully accepting of that and felt like we needed to—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Change with it.

MARY CARPENTER:

Change direction. And we did and it was successful. And then I guess the third phase, which I noted in the history. When I quit, we had around \$10,000, around \$10,000, we had a mailing list of over 1200 people, we had sound equipment and an incredible music collection and we turned all that over to a woman named Felicia Scott [coughs]. I communicated with her, it looks like she was involved from 2000 to 2006. Smaller scale, they did some things down at the Ethical Society down on Clayton Road. Maybe once at COCA or CASA, I can't remember. So she might be another piece to this that the History Museum or maybe the [St. Louis LGBT] History Project will deal with. Looking back, I can't believe we had the time or the energy—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

[laughs] I know!

MARY CARPENTER:

To do what we did. The other aspect, which was really pretty incredible, was that we would hire some skilled people. We had a great sound technician in the later years named Jackie Mollett from the Berklee College of Music. But in every aspect of event production, if you volunteered and you wanted to learn, you could work side by side with a sound technician, a lighting technician, an MC, a stage manager, a DJ. We had countless numbers of women helping as producers, stage managers, sound and lighting, MCs, DJs, ticket takers, artists, decorators on holidays or special occasions, publicists, supporters. Volunteers had opportunities to work with skilled technicians and women who had experience in all production aspects. So that was pretty significant and that kind of emerged, that wasn't like something we set out, but it just emerged just as the revenue and everything else did. Looking at all the different venues, I just did this yesterday trying to figure out how many dances we did over the years. So counting the dances that we did after concerts, there's at least 150 that I can account for in that period of time. I didn't count up the concerts but here. [counting] With the dances alone there were fourteen different venues and so that was pretty incredible I think. We were always on the lookout and when the need would arise we would always be on the lookout for places. Let's talk about the entertainment though, we really haven't talked about the people that we brought in too much. Kate Clinton, that comic I told you about, we ended up bringing her probably five or six times in that time span. We talked about the co-productions with big artists like Janis, Janis Ian. Janis Ian was a rock icon in the sixties. She had a song called Society's Child about a woman dating an African-American man, right?

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Mhm.

MARY CARPENTER:

Which was a top 40 hit. She was really cool. Patty Larkin was another artist that was nationally known. (00:40:00:00) In terms of the...the very outrageous show in 1994 was Dos Fallopia. Were you still around for that?

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Yes. They stayed at my house [unintelligible]. Sometimes the talent, or the performers, didn't want to be in a hotel, but some place real life. So when they did want that, they would stay...we had a big brick house on Flora Place with lots of guest rooms. That's the one I really remember staying, others did too, but I'm not sure who. I don't remember who they were.

MARY CARPENTER:

You were too young to watch Pee Wee's Playhouse, but you know who Pee Wee Herman is?



JACOB HONIGMAN:

Yes.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

He did a Broadway thing recently.

MARY CARPENTER:

He would have a Christmas special and he would always have the Del Rubio Triplets, these women who were in their seventies. They wore mini-skirts and go go boots and they would sing Christmas carols so we bought them. It was on your poster, “Three Guitars, Three Gals, One Birthday.” Then a group called Jasmine, a local group, opened for them. So this was in St. Louis Magazine, a picture of them at the Sheldon. They were outrageous, they played rock songs, Rolling Stones songs. That was probably a pretty big stretch for us.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

[laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

[laughs] We probably lost some credibility, but people did have a good time. That’s the Del Rubio Triplets if you ever heard of them. In here I kind of have pictures, this is a picture of Kate Clinton, the comic, anyway. [coughs] Anybody else on that list stick out? There was a comedy duo called Dos Fallopa, these two women who were really hysterical. Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet, we brought them to the Sheldon in 1996. They were named after an old woman named Billy Tipton who passed as a man in order to be accepted in the jazz world. So that was a tribute to her.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Holly Near, we brought Holly Near, she’s kind of mainstream.

MARY CARPENTER:

She’s kind of the mother of lesbian music in a lot of ways. Heather Bishop and Sherry Schute—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Cris Williamson.

MARY CARPENTER:

Cris Williamson. Huge lesbian national [unintelligible]...Marga Gomez, another comic—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

From New York, incredibly famous.

MARY CARPENTER:

And Two Nice Girls, a really hip band from Austin, Texas, their St. Louis debut. June and Jean Millington, Lucie Blue Tremblay—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Betty.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Betty

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Betty's still big, they're performing in New York all the time.

MARY CARPENTER:  
I think they perform on the Olivia cruises, things like that. The production aspect, we gathered as a group [unintelligible], we got into all of production; stage passes, tickets, this is Lea DeLaria who's on Orange is the New Black on Netflix. She's from St. Louis and we brought her back as a comedian, she sang too. Were you around then?

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Yes.

MARY CARPENTER:  
She was outrageous.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
There was a poster, there wasn't a flyer—

MARY CARPENTER:  
No filters.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
It said we brought Lea DeLaria home for Thanksgiving.

MARY CARPENTER:  
There were no filters with her.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Oh no. [crosstalk] Much like the character she is on Orange is the New Black, the character she plays is herself.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Typically we'd have programs like this for the events. A typical concert, how many people are there? There's probably twenty people here and another fifteen down there, so there could be forty to fifty people involved in one production. People loved it, they loved associating with, they loved the opportunity to be around artists. The artists loved how they were treated.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

We always had a buffet that had food and drink out on a long table backstage all day during loading and sound checks and all that. Many commented on how nicely they were treated and taken care and we always had, I think we called them keepers, it was hospitality. Someone was in charge of every performer to do their bidding, whatever they required. They'd get them something to eat or drink or whatever they needed (00:45:00:00). Someone commented on the stage manager and the whole backstage, she said "I'm used to a big guy with a cigar in his mouth saying 'okay, go on out there' but this is wonderful." We took care of them.

MARY CARPENTER:

It's true. We had a national reputation with the agents of the artists as treating artists the way they should be treated. Probably, one of our most prestigious things was this group Zap Mama, they were from Belgium, and we cosponsored here at Edison Theatre, which is wonderful. Eve, I can't remember her last name, was the director of Edison Theatre, she reached out to us. That was really kind of cool, it was out of our comfort zone but we did it. Edison [Theatre] still does a great ovation series. Pook was, I was kind of behind the scenes but [Pook] was the face of Wired Women because you would MC the shows and everything. We have video of a lot of our shows, I just want to say that.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Well thank you.

MARY CARPENTER:

You did a heck of a good job.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Thank you!

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah you were funny—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

MARY CARPENTER:

And sincere. You were talented and always treated the artists wonderfully.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

It was a great gig [laughs].

MARY CARPENTER:

Any questions? That was a long answer to your question an hour ago. [laughs]

JACOB HONIGMAN:

Yeah, no. I think you guys really kind of covered all of it in terms of the Wired Women stuff. So if you wouldn't mind, I would really like to hear about your personal lives if you

wouldn't mind sharing just to kind of give some context of what the community looked like and your own personal experiences.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Like what looked like?

JACOB HONIGMAN:  
What the community here in St. Louis looked like and your own personal experiences in your personal life versus your Wired Women life.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Like I said in the beginning, the community early on was parties in people's basement because they were in the closet and people weren't really out. To go out and about, like we said, there weren't that many places to do it. So Wired Women opened the community to me, introduced me to the community, and being in Bluefish Cove, the community knew me then. There's good and bad to that, I tell people I had a small amount of what might be called fame and I don't want it ever again because people are intimidated if you're famous. I would say "hi I'm Pook" and they would say "oh everybody knows who you are." Well can I find out who you are? I just happened to introduce myself to people. Wired Women opened up the community to me but it also caused a bit of a challenge to be the voice or the face of Wired Women. I still wouldn't trade a moment of it, it was just wonderful.

MARY CARPENTER:  
I grew up in south St. Louis, I grew up Catholic, I went through Catholic schools K-12, so thirteen years of Catholicism.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Nuns.

MARY CARPENTER:  
I came out in college, I was an athlete on the women's volleyball and basketball team, and that's how I came out, I met someone through that. That was my first relationship. We were a bit isolated because I remember going once in a while to some bars that were pretty rough and pretty [coughs]...and there was one near the Grove area. Everybody was nice, it wasn't rough, but it wasn't very well taken care of, it was pretty—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Seedy?

MARY CARPENTER:  
Dirty. They'd take the pool table and put out a spread of food on an occasion or something but nothing was that pretty. What happened was that a lot of bars, I'm sure your mapping project has figured out that one would open, one would close, one would open, one would [close]. There wasn't really a Cheers kind of place, where everybody knew your name.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

The financial difference between men's income and women's income was why there were so many (00:50:00:00) male bars and so few women's.

MARY CARPENTER:

In fact, a friend of mine said, who's older than me and came out earlier, there was a place in the [Central] West End called the Potpourri, something at the bottom of the pit or something, and she said the same old thing: men on top, women on the bottom. There were two separate bars—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Women were downstairs [laughs].

MARY CARPENTER:

Yeah, yeah women were downstairs, but anyways. For me, when I came out...coming out in a relationship, you're a little bit secluded, but then you want to be more social. It's kind of like having a second adolescence in a lot of ways. I think, I don't know how I met Barbara and Connie, it might have been on a softball team, [laughs] I'm not sure. So lesbian, stereotypical. There were a lot of women coming out at that time and around my age. There were a big, core group of people. It was a hopping place, St. Louis was. People were paranoid about their jobs. So Wired Women met so many needs for me because it met my music goal, I loved my passion for music and being able to put music together and of course meeting people.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I was actually married and have a daughter. This kind of strange path but feminist leaning, I read Tom Robbins' *Even Cowgirls Get The Blues* and it was like an explosion in my brain, it was like whoa. I realized that maybe there were other options for me. I had something else in mind there but I lost track.

MARY CARPENTER:

How old was your daughter when you were involved in Wired Women?

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I came out when she was three.

MARY CARPENTER:

Three, okay.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

I was going somewhere with that and I can't remember where. Bless you.

MARY CARPENTER:

Sorry.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Sorry. I forgot.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Yeah, a lot of women over the years have said oh that's where I met my partner, at one of your dances. It was really fun and...bars didn't typically play slow songs. As a DJ we would kind of keep it kind of going like that all night. There was great music, a combination of music that I grew up with like Motown, Oldies. Michael Jackson was really big, the Pointer Sisters. In fact, at home, I have copies of my DJ lists from a lot of dances. I have recordings of dances that we did on tape. We recorded the whole night just so I could listen to myself mixing music and blending music.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
As I said at the beginning, it was definitely lesbian-oriented but the feminism end of it too. Sisters are doing it on their own. There was an empowerment of women—

MARY CARPENTER:  
We Are Family, Sister Sledge. We are family, I've got all my sisters with me. So there was great music during that era too, I should've brought the lists and talked about some of the music. In fact, when Prince died, I had copies of some of my vinyl from him and it was like, thank you Prince. When Doves Cry and all his songs that he did were huge dance standards for our dances. I think we introduced lesbians to a lot of music that they might not have—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
That they weren't listening to otherwise.

MARY CARPENTER:  
So kind of pushed the boundaries a little bit. There was also always literature, flyers about political events and things—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Things were announced from the stage before, there'd always be a list of things people needed to know about what was going on. He's still a prisoner, it's still an issue, the Native American prisoner. Pelt—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Leonard Peltier.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Peltier. So we tried to stay really current on the issues of the day.

MARY CARPENTER:  
There was political stuff in our music (00:55:00:00), I remember playing Free Nelson Mandela. There was a whole dance song about freeing Nelson Mandela so it was cool. If you meet lesbians who probably what, fifty five to seventy—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
I'm seventy three.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Say hey, did you ever go to Heartbreak? [laughs] They'd say yeah. Just like Michigan is the code word for the Michigan Women's Music Festival that doesn't happen anymore—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
[laughs] I was at a women's RV rally a couple of years ago—

MARY CARPENTER:  
Did a fight break out? [laughs]

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
No, no. [laughs] A couple of these women came up and said oh have you been to the other rallies, I met you in Kansas City. Oh, no no. Boy, you look familiar. Then she'd say how about, and she'd bring up something else. Finally, it was like Wired Women, you were the MC.

MARY CARPENTER:  
Wired Women holds...are you familiar with the Sheldon Concert Hall?

JACOB HONIGMAN:  
Not really.

MARY CARPENTER:  
It is down by the Fox Theatre on the Grand Arts—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
On Grandell. [sic]

MARY CARPENTER:  
Wired Women holds the attendance record for the Sheldon ballroom—

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Really?

MARY CARPENTER:  
The concert hall, Kate Clinton, I think we had 900 people in there.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Wow.

MARY CARPENTER:

I think it sat 850 but then they changed it later on and the capacity was smaller but we had standing room only, to this day it holds the record for attendance.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Excellent.

MARY CARPENTER:  
We eventually went other places because the Sheldon, they got a whole new group of people in there, and they started doing very expensive series and things like that so they weren't really into the community thing anymore so that's kind of why we had to pursue some other [places]. But it was cool for a while, it was our home. We even stored our sound equipment there, it got stolen one time, but we stored our equipment there because we did so many events there. It's a pretty incredible venue so check it out before you move to Texas.

JACOB HONIGMAN:  
Awesome. I guess one last question. You talked a lot about, in the beginning of your story, about how there wasn't really a women's space here in St. Louis. That you felt as though either it wasn't safe for women or a lot of the LGBT spaces were more 'G' focused. When you were a part of Wired Women, was there any interaction between gay men's spaces or gay men's organizations in the city?

MARY CARPENTER:  
Men attended our events.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
They did. They certainly did, the concert part of it. There's a list of the men's...

MARY CARPENTER:  
Gateway Men's Chorus

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
Men's Chorus.

MARY CARPENTER:  
You know, I'm not sure which year they started but the guys always had so many bars to choose from. I would say that the Gateway Men's Chorus is the first cultural organization and they started years after we did. That's one thing we found with younger women, they tended to be more integrated with gay men, which is great. A lot of the older lesbians, because they were closeted, they kind of stuck to themselves.

BARBARA PFAFFE:  
They didn't want a male presence.

MARY CARPENTER:



Here's one thing that I did, representing Wired Women. There were several lesbian, gay, LGBT organizations in St. Louis and there were a lot of events going on, so one thing I did...we had a gay and lesbian center up on Grand Avenue for a while and I got people from all these organizations together and we did a calendar of events. These are two versions of it, I don't think we did it for that long but this is 1996, 1997. My attitude was (01:00:00:00) we're all in this together, let's help each other and publicize events and stuff like that. Anyways, that was one thing, so there were some men's organizations. New Line Theatre, Scott Miller, and yeah, mostly that. The other thing is that Wired Women and a men's, well not exclusively gay men's group, but a group called the Late Knights of Pythias—

BARBARA PFAFFE:

That's what I was looking for on this other list.

MARY CARPENTER:

K-N-I-G-H-T-S. We provided the seed money for the first St. Louis International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1996. It was held at the Avalon Theatre which is now a parking lot on South Kingshighway, just south of Chippewa. That was another thing, we were always looking...that was a major coup with a group of gay men. Very artistic, funky, wonderful, gay men and the Late Knights of Pythias had the biggest St. Louis Halloween party, all night Halloween party, in St. Louis. They would start decorating for it months ahead of time, the Beaux Arts building across from the Fox Theatre. This was one networking thing that I was really, really proud of. It was hard to do, it was hard to get everybody together quickly. Does that count?

JACOB HONIGMAN:

Yeah!

BARBARA PFAFFE:

[laughs]

MARY CARPENTER:

Good.

JACOB HONIGMAN:

No, thank you. Thank you. Is there anything else that I haven't covered, or you haven't covered, that you want to be on this or shared?

MARY CARPENTER:

No.

JACOB HONIGMAN:

I've got a very full perspective of Wired Women so I really appreciate you taking the time to come and talk to me today.

BARBARA PFAFFE:

Sure.

MARY CARPENTER:

We appreciate it too and good luck, the best of luck with this, this is tremendous. So we're really, really happy so tell Professor Friedman and the rest of your colleagues, your students, that we're really happy to be doing this. St. Louis has a strong history and we're happy to be part of it.

[end of transcript]

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