

Con Ganas Alix Olson

By Maria Ayala

With a book and a DVD coming out, power poet Alix Olson shares with us her travels, thoughts and turning points as she tours towards San Diego, with a message of power, politics, popcorn and laughter.

Maria Ayala: *The last time you were here in San Diego was at Dyke March 2003, back in September. What significance do events like these have for our LGBT community?*

Alix Olson: "What significance *don't* they have? They bring joy and power to our community. They add a sense of urgency to politics and hopefully it reminds us of how many of us there really are—plus, it's a good time to meet girls!"

Yes, I would agree with that! How is your tour going thus far?

"Great! It's the end of our first month, and we have another month and a half to go, ending in Hawaii. I've had packed shows, meet great people, and heard great stories. One of the reasons I wanted to tour in the spring was for the April 25th Rally March for Choice; as well as to encourage people to re-engage in the voting process, especially heading towards November."

I noticed that you decided to include the piece, "Subtle Sister," at the end of your Independence Meal CD. You read it with what we call in Spanish: Ganas. Why was including this piece significant for you?

Wow! No one has ever asked me that question! I want to remind myself why my company is called Subtle Sister.

I remember being told that my poetry should be more subtle. But that's not what's important to me in art; truth telling and consciousness raising are my purpose. How I do it has empowered me through the years, with more, ganas.

Do you write while on the road or do you reserve that for your time off?

I write in large quantities while I'm on the road, but nothing solid. I scribble in note books about how I feel and about the small experiences that impact me. When I was off for two months, my dad had a heart attack and almost died.

I'm so sorry to hear that.

Thanks. He's doing really well now.

How difficult was your selection for your Independence Meal CD?

Well, in *Independence Meal*, I was coming from a break up romantically, and simultaneously the country was in political turmoil, after September 11. It was a declaration of independence for me, romantically, and from patriotism, politically. It's about a macrocosmic dualism, with one little poet at the center.

I'm interested in your Pirates piece. How do you suggest the LGBT community "steal back the truth"?

First is by rearranging the media. The mainstream media uses certain vernacular when discussing politics, that comes straight down from the governmental powers-that-be, to the point where us average people adopt it in our vocabulary...for example, "collateral

damage" comes to represent people and "insurgents" come to represent, "Iraqi civilians fighting to protect their country." There is no in-depth analysis of the media, no questioning of the origin of that information. Alternatively, moveon.org, and truthout.org, have grassroots ways of dispersing information. They aren't owned by any corporate conglomerate, so they can afford to be more honest in their relaying of facts. We need a much larger contingent to fight within the system to get more prominent public airways.

I understand that you taught poetry to female prisoners. Do you miss teaching?

I do. I get the opportunity sometimes to do workshops. I love those times. They have a serious impact on me because it's about women finding their voices. I've seen women crying because they find themselves saying something, or they cry out from sheer frustration because they can't get something out. As women, we are not allowed to reach out and express ourselves. But that's what art is all about: It's about the reclaiming of self.

Do you feel any more or less vulnerable when you're on stage performing more personal pieces such as 8x10?

No, I don't. I think that's because my politics are so personal to me. They go hand in hand. I think the way in which we conduct our romantic relationships are part of the larger power dynamic whole. I am equally vulnerable in my politics and personal relations because they are both different from the mainstream; for example, I have different views on relationships and monogamy.

entertainment

Your pieces, *Wholly Human*, and *Subway Lips*, I find to be more spiritual. Can we expect the topic of spirituality in your future work?

I don't know. I hope so! For me, Lipstick (in reference to *Subway Lips*), is a symbol of assimilation for women, a signifier of blending in, like saying, 'You're ok as long as you're wearing lipstick.' I think any of those tools can be used to re-claim or re-assert identity, as well, to turn those mainstream concepts on their head.

What plans do you have after your tour ends?

I'm going in a different direction with my work. I don't know what that is yet! I love art and poetry. We'll see what happens. We'll see what happens with Bush's re-election and where I feel I need to go...!

You have a DVD coming out?

Yes, it's one and a half hours long, with about 10-11 performance pieces. It's about what it's like to be on tour and all the hotel traveling. It comes out in August.

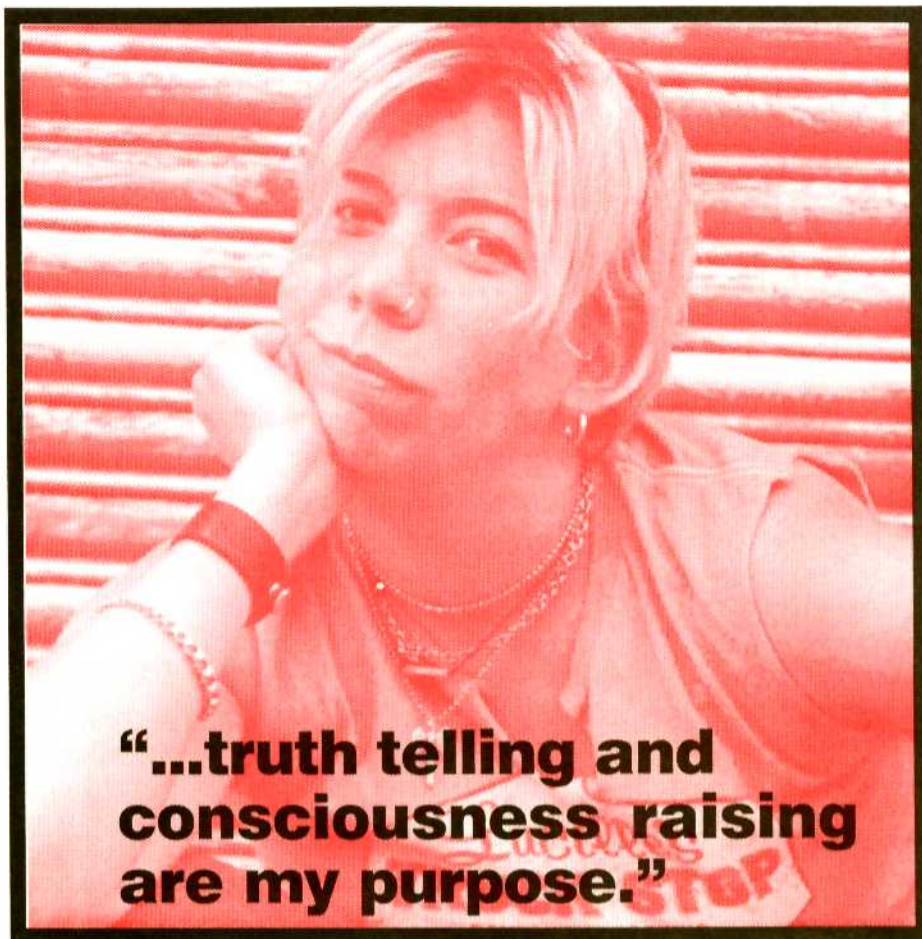
And you also have a book coming out?

Yes, it should be out in May: *Independence Meal: The Ingredients*.

One last question: What advice do you have for women who are trying to find their voice, but may feel shy or intimidated by their peers?

I would say, that it's never as scary as it seems! I remember having approached the mic with some trepidation—the first step is to find a place where you feel really comfortable, where they make it impossible to be afraid.

Alix Olson loves San Diego! You can expect to find her show at Twiggs Coffee House at 4590 Park Blvd. on Sunday, May 23, to be an energetic and honest one! It starts at 8:30 pm. The cover is \$10.00, and the event is open to all ages! Check her out at Twiggs or at alixolson.com λ



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