

Dwyer says. “We’re talking about social power – always. We’re talking about why transgression and rule-breaking exist. We’re incorporating science, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history. We’re employing analytical strategies and bringing together written expression and practical application.”

Drag’s deeper lessons – the ones Dwyer says his students have really taken to heart – are about self-perception and the way people are defined by societal expectations, often against their will. The recent rash of suicide among gay teens has brought these lessons into sharp focus, he says.

“Drag is about holding up gender values that are okay, even though they may not be mainstream,” he says. “It’s okay if you’re a girl who walks like a boy. It’s okay if you’re a boy who doesn’t want to play football. Drag celebrates the fact that some of us don’t, or can’t, be mainstream with our genders – and that holds true for straight kids as well as gay kids.”

For many students, the turning point in the semester was a screening of “Paris Is Burning,” Jennie Livingston’s 1990 documentary film about drag in New York’s underclass. The film documents the raucous “drag balls” of the 1980s, which, for the participants, became a powerful expression of personal and community pride. Dwyer says the film helped bring home the significance of drag with the class.

“For some people, drag is a survival strategy. It’s drag or die,” he says. “After the film, I think the class started seeing that it’s not just fun. It’s not just glitter and being silly.”

Schmidt applauds the students for the risks they’re taking, both as performers and as people. He says he’s definitely a fan – and he thinks Allentown’s Stonewall Bar regulars will be, too.

“I’m so impressed with how this class is open to exploring diversity of all kinds, by how wide-open their eyes are to that,” he says. “It took my breath away that this could be happening on a college campus.”

Ken Elkinson '94 Creates a Soundtrack for Your Daily Drive

by Catherine Schwartz '11

No matter where you live, or what your occupation – or even your employment status – no one is completely free of some sort of commute. Regardless of whether it’s grueling or quick, on the way to a place you dread or a place you love, Ken Elkinson '94, has created a box set, *Music for Commuting*, that provides a soundtrack for your daily journeys. This ambient instrumental music is the latest of Elkinson’s projects.

Elkinson began playing classical music as a child, but it was while he was a student at Muhlenberg that he was encouraged to write and compose. Though he majored in business and economics, he took drum lessons from Dr. Douglas Ovens, as well as many other classes in the music department.

“Muhlenberg gave me the resources and guidance. The caliber of people that I had as my professors was extraordinary. Because of this I already started out with a huge advantage and was able to use these resources to shape my own career and density,” says Elkinson.

The Red Door Café provided the perfect venue for student performances, and the proximity of Muhlenberg to New York and Philadelphia allowed Elkinson to experience music in many different ways. He fondly remembers the Lehigh Valley as a hot spot of amazing musicians, where you could see a range of performances from jazz to rock. As a student, Elkinson would utilize the practice rooms in the basement of the Center for the Arts and play the baby grand pianos any time of any day. It was this love that led him into his music projects post-graduation.

Currently, Elkinson lives in a small house in Venice Beach, Calif., and does not have room for a baby grand piano. When he began recording music, he would compose on a small keyboard, then go to studio and to record on the pianos there. Eventually this method got frustrating so he started playing around with keyboard and synthesizers in his home studio.

What began with one song turned into a six-disc set of sixty songs. “I get inspired from the whole process of playing,” he says. “This project was more spontaneous and improvised, whereas the piano stuff is more agonizing.”

Elkinson’s ties to Muhlenberg are still strong, and he even says that some friends from his college days helped him name several tracks on *Music for Commuting*.

Music for Commuting has received favorable press in the United States and abroad and even scored a plug on the popular NPR program, “Car Talk.” It, and his six other CDs, are available for purchase at www.kenelkinson.com.

