



A SPECIAL IN THEIR OWN WORDS: PROF. RICHIE UNTERBERGER

In Their Own Words, usually an interview by and penned by the Fromm Institute office staff of a notable Fromm Institute community member, makes a shift this week with an interview of Prof. Unterberger by Fromm Institute Student Association officers, Arlene Waksberg and Maxine Einhorn. Their interview is below.

THE VERY HIP RICHIE UNTERBERGER – WHAT YOU MAY KNOW AND WHAT YOU DON'T

Richie Unterberger has been writing histories about rock and popular music of all kinds for more than 25 years, writing a dozen books on myriad artists including known and unknown legends, interviewing cult and folk-rockers. He has written extensively on Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, The Velvet Underground, The Who, Bob Marley, Fleetwood Mac etc., etc. To us he is our fave professor of pop with his very own beat.

WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?

I grew up in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, just a mile or two from the border of Philadelphia. I moved to the Bay Area in 1983 after graduating from college.

HOW AND WHEN DID YOU GET HOOKED ON ROCK AND ROLL?

I've been listening to rock since I was about five years old. There was always rock and roll in my house since I had three older brothers. Starting around late 1967, I listened to the radio while falling asleep in the bedroom I shared with one of them.

Like so many people, I really got hooked on rock and roll through the Beatles. I always liked their music since I first heard them when I was four or five, and the first single I got was “Hey Jude”/ “Revolution.” That was a great start, not only because there were two great songs on one 45 single, but also because “Hey Jude” is so long (about seven minutes). So you got about ten and a half minutes of music on one single.

But in third grade, 1969-1970, I really got into the Beatles and tried to hear everything I could of theirs – not so easy in the days long before the Internet. Through the Beatles, I started to more seriously investigate other acts of that time, like the Rolling Stones and the Beach Boys. By high school I was getting deeper into that era with groups like the Doors, the Byrds, the Who, and Jefferson Airplane. The more I heard, the more I wanted to hear, and that led me to literally thousands of records and acts.

A SPECIAL IN THEIR OWN WORDS CONTINUES...

WHEN DID YOU START WRITING ABOUT MUSIC? HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

Like a lot of music journalists, I was a DJ on my college radio station. The main motivation was to have access to their huge record library of about 50,000 LPs. Not long before graduation, I talked with a staff member of the station about career ideas. She suggested I write for a small national magazine specializing in independent/underground music, Op. They didn't pay, but they printed my material. That led to a position (paid, though not that much) as editor for a magazine that grew out of Op, Option.

In the early 1990s I started writing for a music website/database, **All Music**, who published books of their reviews. The publisher of that series was based in the Bay Area, and asked me if I had ideas for books of my own. That led to my first books in the late 1990s, though I've always had to supplement book work with a lot of other writing for magazines, websites, and liner notes. And, since the early twenty-first century, teaching and presenting events on rock and soul music history.

DO YOU PLAY AN INSTRUMENT YOURSELF?

I can play guitar and piano, though not very well. I've never played professionally.

WHICH HAVE BEEN YOUR ABSOLUTELY FAVORITE ARTISTS TO LISTEN TO AND WRITE ABOUT?

WHO WAS THE MOST INTERESTING TO INTERVIEW? WHO WAS THE WEIRDEST?

My favorite artists would fill up a pretty long list. But my very favorite are, maybe unsurprisingly, the ones I've done courses on, or featured prominently in my courses. The Beatles are still #1, and the Rolling Stones, the Who, and the Doors (all of whom I've featured in Fromm courses) are way up there too. Others would include the Byrds, the Yardbirds, the Velvet Underground, the Beach Boys, the Kinks, and early Pink Floyd. You can tell that the 1960s are my favorite era, though I like music from some other decades too.

Some of my most interesting interviews include those with Kinks guitarist Dave Davies; Byrds leader Roger McGuinn; Judy Collins; and Paul Jones, lead singer of Manfred Mann. Those are famous figures who had big hits, but some of the best ones were with people who aren't so well known, in part because their stories haven't been told nearly as often, or at all. I've interviewed Arthur Brown, whose sole hit was "Fire" (the one that started with the shout "I am the god of hellfire"), three times. I interviewed Billy Harrison, guitarist with Van Morrison's first group, Them, for several hours over the course of two days in Belfast. Morrison is very well known, but Harrison had tons of info and perspective on the music from Morrison's early days as a recording artist.

The weirdest, which was over the phone, was Davy Graham. He's a British guitarist who isn't too well known, but was influential on more famous people like Jimmy Page and Richard Thompson. I don't want to come down hard on someone whose faculties might have been impaired by the time I spoke with him. But he was pretty impenetrable, sometimes responding with replies that had little or nothing to do with my questions. When he made a joke about cannibals in an elevator, apropos of nothing, I knew it was time to wrap up.

A SPECIAL IN THEIR OWN WORDS CONTINUES...

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF PUNK ROCK GROUPS LIKE THE CLASH AND THE SEX PISTOLS WHICH WERE BIG IN THE UK? AND PEOPLE LIKE PATTI SMITH?

I'm more interested in punk and new wave as a social phenomenon than for the styles' musical merits. Rock had in some ways gotten stale in the mid-1970s, and I appreciate and to some degree empathize with their need to do something different and rebellious. I don't think the music itself was as creative as the best previous rock, and not as melodic. I like the early punk and new wave artists who did use some pop melody in their work better, like Patti Smith and Blondie, both of whom were included in my course on the first 25 years of women in rock.

DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH THE ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT ETHOS EXPRESSED BY SO MANY OF THE GROUPS YOU WRITE ABOUT? DO YOU SEE YOUR WORK AS POLITICAL AT ALL?

Yes, certainly. Even before rock got more overtly concerned with social issues starting in the mid-1960s, I think it represented an alternative and to a large degree rebellion against more conformist values of previous generations.

Although my writing covers musical creativity and innovation more than the artists' social dimensions, I see it as political in how it sheds light on how much of the popular music of the twentieth century was shaped in some ways by its social context. Those don't just include the important problems of racism and social justice. It also encompasses how the music and entertainment business changed; the differences between how large and small record labels operate; the business disputes that can sometimes victimize musicians and break up groups; and how radio, television, and the changing ways concert venues presented music influenced musical growth and change.

A lot of my writing has been about well-known stars, but a lot of it's been about notable artists who never got big hits, or at least certainly never got the level of recognition they deserved. I see that as political because many historians—not just music historians—focus on the most famous figures to the exclusion of others who played important and just downright interesting roles. Good and creative music will find its audience if it's good enough, but making people aware of it in the first place is a crucial part of the process. Increasing appreciation of such lost or buried music is in turn crucial to making sure they're represented in history, and not unjustly forgotten in favor of those who sold a lot of records.

DO YOU SEE SOME OF THESE MUSICIANS AS INFLUENTIAL IN CULTURAL TERMS AND IN WHAT WAYS?

Yes, in ways that are related to what I noted in my response to the question above. From rock's beginning, I think the music's made countless people aware that there are different ways of looking at and appreciating the world. I still think rock and soul are vastly underrated factors in easing racial tensions and eroding segregation, as African-Americans in particular have been so important in the music's development. If you loved their music, how could you hate them as people? Even if you didn't hate them as people, the music helped bring you in contact with ways of life and artistic expression that you might not have found otherwise.

A SPECIAL IN THEIR OWN WORDS CONCLUDES

Again from the mid-‘60s onward in particular, as lyrics became more complex, I think rock provoked listeners into at least questioning many institutions that were largely taken for granted by previous generations. Not just whether certain wars or war itself was justified, but also whether much could be improved in the world’s social and environmental justice.

And also, you could do this while having fun — a concept that’s sometimes overlooked. Rock improved the lives of, at this point, probably billions of people not only by entertaining them. It’s also contributed, in many ways, to helping spread the joy they feel when listening to many aspects of their lives, music-related or otherwise.

DO TODAY’S YOUNG PEOPLE LISTEN TO MUSIC FROM THE 60S AND 70S?

I’m not an expert on this, not having children or being in touch with a lot of people of that age group on a regular basis. I do have the sense that now that such a large amount of music from the past is easily available online, there’s a greater awareness of those sounds than there was when I was their age. It was pretty unusual, for instance, to be a Doors fan among people I knew in high school, though it was only about a half dozen years after Jim Morrison died; there was only one other student in my 450-strong class who was a Doors fan, to my knowledge. It was yet more unusual for someone of that age to know much about, say, Chuck Berry, who’s prime was almost twenty years in the past. Let alone pre-rock greats like Dizzy Gillespie, although their best recordings were “only” thirty years old. That was considered ancient history, almost like the dinosaurs.

Young people are always understandably going to be most interested in recent or current music. But I think there’s a greater chronological range to their tastes, if only because many of their parents and now grandparents listen to rock, which was seldom the case during most of the twentieth century.

Here are a couple examples that illustrate this. I saw Paul McCartney in concert in the Polo Fields in Golden Gate Park in 2013. There were lots of young, sometimes very young, people in the audience. Probably many were there with their parents or grandparents. And many of the young people—I’m talking ones that looked as young as eight—were not just enjoying the concert, but singing along with the songs. Not just the huge hits, either, but some of the lesser-known Beatles songs McCartney plays, often word for word.

Also, there’s a 15-year-old student in a community education class on the Doors I teach that’s open to all age groups. She’s coming with her father, and though she doesn’t say much, I have the sense she’s enjoying the class. She’s even taking notes, though it’s not a credit course. At the last session, I’ll ask her how people her age feel about the Doors and music from that time in general.



Prof. Richie Unterberger

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ALL THE FUN YOU GIVE
FROMM STUDENTS!**

Arlene Waksberg + Maxine Einhorn

POETRY FOR A PANDEMIC

Fromm Institute student and writer, Mary Joy Quinn offers up another poem for this week's *Poetry for a Pandemic*. Submissions to *Poetry for a Pandemic*, *Express Yourself* or *In The Virtual Gallery* are accepted on a rolling basis. Email your submissions to **Scott Moules** in the Fromm Institute office (moules@usfca.edu or fromm@usfca.edu).

PLEAS

By Mary Joy Quinn

Beloved country
Quivers, groans, shudders and moans
Struggles, confronts, hopes

To rebuild itself
Free of injustice and strife
Is this too lofty?

How many lifetimes?
Can't we just sprint now, follow
Our better angels?

Our beautiful selves
Our clear commonalities
Our urgent yearnings

Ditch the cruelty
Mindfulness for one and all
Refresh, reclaim dreams.

Eyes open to change
Our stiff joints loosen
Our faces aglow

ARE YOU LONGING TO SEE AND HEAR YOUR FROMMIE FRIENDS AGAIN? OR PERHAPS MAKE SOME NEW FRIENDS?

Join a free drop-in Fromm Institute Social Session via Zoom, Monday - Thursday before and/or after classes.

- The morning socials run from 9:00 a.m. until 9:30 a.m.
- Afternoon socials are held from 3:00 p.m. until 3:30 p.m.
- You need to register for the social sessions through MyFromm (just once for each time slot)
- If you register, Fromm staff will send you a link to join these informal gatherings about 30 minutes before the start time, or you can get to them directly through your MyFromm account.
- While the staff will not be present in the social gatherings they are available if there are technical difficulties or if problems arise in the Zoom gatherings. Just call the office at 415-422-6805 email fromm@usfca.edu.
- You don't have to talk if you don't want to and you can have your video on or off.
- These sessions are for YOU, so join in!

USF SILK SPEAKER SERIES

A REMINDER: SILK SPEAKER SERIES PRESENTS KRISTI YAMAGUCHI & MICHELLE WIE WEST

5 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021
War Memorial Gymnasium at the Sobrato Center

[Register Now »](#)

The *Silk Speaker Series* at the University of San Francisco welcomes you to attend a conversation with Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi and professional golfer Michelle Wie West. The conversation will be moderated by USF alumna and NBC News correspondent Vicky Nguyen.

Whether it's a hole in one or sticking the landing, these accomplished women may have been the first, but they won't be the last! Learn how these extraordinary women are paving the way for others and using their voice and powerful platforms for social change. [Learn more and register.](#)

Can't attend? Please register and we'll send you a link to the recording!

CONVERSATORY ON RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD WITH PROF. MARA KOLESAS

Friday, October 15, 10 a.m.

RIGHTS, ACTIVISM AND REPRESENTATION -
REFLECTIONS FROM THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA

Sossie Kasbarian in Conversation with Mara Kolesas



[Sossie Kasbarian](#) is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Stirling and currently an academic visitor at the Oriental Institute, the University of Oxford (Michaelmas 2021). She earned her doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in 2006. She has been a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Edinburgh and has taught at SOAS, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva), the University of Lancaster (England), and the American University in Cairo. She is co-editor of *Diaspora- A Journal of Transnational Studies*.

Dr. Kasbarian's research interests and publications broadly span diaspora studies; contemporary Middle East politics and society; nationalism and ethnicity; transnational political activism; refugee, displacement and migration studies. She is the co-editor (with Anthony Gorman) of [Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualising Community](#) (Edinburgh University Press 2015) and the forthcoming [Diaspora and 'Stateless Power': Social Discipline and Identity Formation Across the Armenian Diaspora during the Long Twentieth Century](#) (co-edited with Talar Chahinian and Tsovin Nalbantian). She is currently working on a monograph entitled, [Diasporizing the modern Middle East – Armenian remnants, resilience and reconfigurations](#). Please see <https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/256684>

[REGISTER HERE](#) for the *Conversatory on Oct 15 at 10 a.m.*

[REGISTER HERE](#) for the *Discussion Group on OCT 15 at 12 p.m.*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 11, IS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DAY AND THE FROMM
INSTITUTE OFFICE WILL CLOSE IN OBSERVATION OF THIS HOLIDAY.
CLASSES WILL NOT MEET, HOWEVER, THEY WILL MEET ONE MORE TIME
DURING MAKE-UP WEEK ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8.

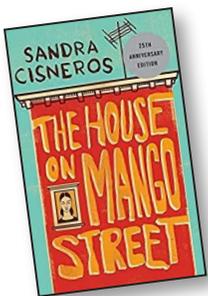
FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>



HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

By MARGARITA UGARTE

Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month by reading along with us. This book list features nonfiction and fiction by Hispanic authors and characters. If you don't know where to start, check out our list.

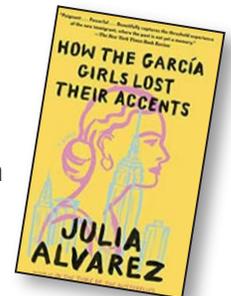


The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

This book is the story of a group of young Latinas growing up and assimilating in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alvarez

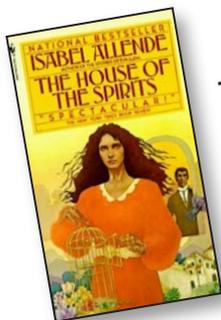
This book describes when the Garcia girls first moved to America from the Dominican Republic, each member feels strong links to the traditions of their homeland.



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Sabrina & Corina: Stories by Kali Fajardo-Anstine

These stories examine the lives of Latinas of indigenous descent living in the American West.



The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende

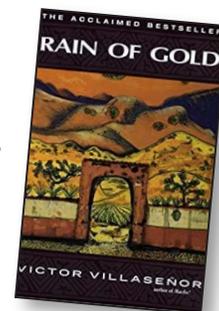
This family saga brings to life the triumphs and tragedies of three generations of the Trueba family.

Ordinary Girls: A Memoir by Jaquira Diaz

In her debut memoir, Diaz shares her experience growing up in Puerto Rico, grappling with personal traumas and over time converts into hope and self-assurance.

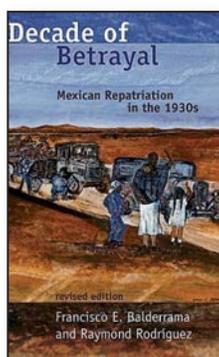
Rain of Gold by Victor Villasenor

This is a true life saga of love, family and destiny from the war ravaged Mexican mountains of Pancho Villa's revolution to the days of Prohibition in California.



The Devil's Highway: A True Story by Luis Alberto Urrea

A Pulitzer Prize finalist, Urrea, tells the story of a group of twenty-six men in May 2001, who attempt to cross the border into the desert of Southern Arizona, through the deadliest region of the continent called the Devil's Highway. Only twelve survive.



Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation by Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez

This book describes the Depression-era paranoia that caused over one million Mexican Nationals and US citizens of Mexican descent to be forced to leave the United States.

BROWN BAG REMINDER:

On **December 1st at 11 a.m.**, the Diversity Task Force is pleased to offer a free Brown Bag **“Learning About Mexican Repatriation”** with Francisco E. Balderrama, Emeritus Professor of Chicano Studies and History at California State University Los Angeles and co-author of Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

PERFORMANCES WITH SUSAN KAPLAN

CHAMBER MUSIC SAN FRANCISCO & MUSIC AT KOHL

There are many venues for chamber music in the Bay Area. Many presenters have survived the pandemic and are presenting “in person” with strict Covid rules in San Francisco. Here are two.

CHAMBER MUSIC SAN FRANCISCO

Founded in 1993, the not-for-profit, Chamber San Francisco presents artists and chamber music in San Francisco, Walnut Creek and Palo Alto. Its aim is to be administratively lean. It is directed by Daniel Levenstein who co-founded the Smuin Ballet and has extensive experience as an arts administrator. By focusing on programming and promotion, he has been able, with contributed support, to keep the tickets among the lowest price in San Francisco.

Chamber San Francisco concentrates on the period of time after the New Year, and will start this year in February, 2022. The program contains a number of quartets, pianists and violinists, some well-known and others who are new to San Francisco. There is a mix of Sunday afternoons at 3:00 and weekday or Saturday evenings at 8:00. If one takes the whole series of 10 concerts, the price is \$360, a savings of \$225 over single ticket prices. There is a discount on 4-5-6 concerts. Chamber San Francisco series or single tickets can be bought at City Box Office. (*Phone number below*). All San Francisco concerts are held at Herbst Theater. Levenstein anticipates that the box office, will be open in 2022, one hour before concerts, and seniors can buy single tickets at a 10% discount 30 minutes before the concert. There is no special rate for Fromm students, at this time. **Telephone for tickets: 415-392-4400.** For program Information and dates, see the website: ChambermusicSF.org.

MUSIC AT KOHL MANSION

Kohl is a very special venue in Burlingame, about 20 miles from downtown San Francisco on either 101 or 280. It is a stately old Mansion, built in 1912, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its Jacobean architecture and cultural significance.

The Chamber Music Series features seven monthly performances on Sundays at 7 PM beginning October 31. The series contains several quartets, a trio, duo plus two musicians from Curtis Institute on tour, and a mixed program featuring San Francisco Symphony musicians. There is a senior discount for a subscription to the whole series or single tickets costing \$292 for seven concerts or \$49 for individual concerts. Only 60% of tickets will be sold due to Covid-19. **Tickets can be purchased by calling the box office at (650) 762-1130** or on the [website](http://MusicatKohl.org), where you can also find program information: MusicatKohl.org.