

PRESS RELEASE

Contact EarSay:
718-791-4324 or 718-784-4066
info@earsay.org

CROSSING THE BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America

Book, Audio CD, Mobile Story Booth and Website, Performance and Traveling Exhibition Uses Oral History, Photography, and Sound, documenting the lives of new immigrants and refugees in the most ethnically diverse locality in the United States

Conceived, written, and compiled by Warren Lehrer and Judith Sloan
Photography and Design by Warren Lehrer, Sound produced by Judith Sloan
WW. Norton & Co.

At a time when immigration issues and policy are being hotly debated throughout the nation, *Crossing the BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America* shares the stories, sounds, and images that reveal the human toll of a cold- and post-cold war-world, and pre- and post-9/11 world. Created by documentary artists Warren Lehrer and Judith Sloan, *Crossing the BLVD* forms a portrait of a paradoxical and ever-shifting America. It intimately portrays the lives of new immigrants and refugees living in Queens, NY, a modern-day Ellis Island where cultures overlap in a choreography of chaotic co-existence. For three years Lehrer/Sloan traveled the world by trekking the streets of their home borough in search of migration stories and a deeper connection to their diverse community. They began their project in 1999 by conducting storytelling workshops in libraries, high schools and community centers throughout Queens. Their journey continued through 2002 via photographic portraits and extended interviews in bodegas, family-owned restaurants, places of worship, public housing projects and private homes. The result is an extraordinary book of photographs and stories, an audio CD, a series of public radio documentaries, a reading/performance tour, a website, and a traveling exhibition of photographic prints, sound stations, and a Mobile Story Booth, allowing one to add one's own portrait and story to the Crossing repository.

The exhibition: The exhibition of photographs, sounds, and stories uses the tools of contemporary art to create a multimedia experience reflecting the changing face of America. **Ninety photographic portraits** by Warren Lehrer portray the proud, colorful humanity, beauty, and struggle of individuals who have crossed through war zones, borders, oceans, and cultural divides. Some subjects are portrayed in various attire, revealing the cultural hybridization experienced by new immigrants. Some portraits are juxtaposed with others to form group portraits of families, neighborhoods, co-workers, teammates, classmates, fellow exiles or band-members. Portraits are paired with short narrative excerpts of the subject's own words; contextual maps of the country or countries of origin overlaid with maps of Queens neighborhoods; panoramic landscapes of Queens and important objects and images that *Crossing the BLVD* participants carry/carried with them from home to home. **Audio sound stations** produced by Judith Sloan enable visitors to hear the voices, sounds and music of those portrayed in this show. Audio pieces include text/audio compositions by Sloan and Lehrer, original music by composer Scott Johnson and participants in the exhibition, as well as *Crossing the BLVD* radio documentaries produced by Sloan and Lehrer for public radio. While the radio documentaries conform to traditions of public radio reportage, Sloan and Lehrer's audio compositions and Johnson's music compositions blur the boundaries between music and speech, journalism and expressionism. An ambient soundscape of people praying, voices on the streets, found and composed music bring visitors into this crossroad of the world upon entering the exhibition. **The Crossing the BLVD Mobile Story Booth**, designed in collaboration with dotsperinch artists Mark Shepard and Carlos Tejada, provides a roving point of access to the *Crossing the BLVD* story archive - an online collection of first-person narratives recounting immigration experiences of Americans. The Booth extends the archive to Museum visitors and to those without an Internet connection. Visitors are invited to contribute their photographs and their own (or their parent's or grandparent's) migration stories. The design of the Booth draws on a variety of references common to the immigration experience including passport photo booths, call center booths, airport and customs checkpoints. The Booth will be looking for a permanent home while it is traveling with the exhibition.

The 400 page, four color book serves as inspiration for the exhibit and is Lehrer's ninth book and his first in collaboration with his wife and partner, actress and oral historian Judith Sloan. One of very few artists books ever published by a major publisher (W.W. Norton), its expressionistic documentary approach defies many traditional notions of photography and oral history books. While Lehrer acknowledges comparisons made to the hypertextual structure of websites and CD-ROMS, he gives more credit to the influence of ancient illuminated

manuscripts such as the Talmud and the Koran. The “Talmudic” structure of this book juxtaposes multiple perspectives (sometimes on a single page) of neighbors who come from opposite ends of the earth. Divided into five movements, the book is symphonic in scope, documenting Lehrer/Sloan’s three year journey around the world through the eyes of their neighbors. Like a film, it is replete with an audio soundtrack. Together, the book and the CD bring to life the voices of a village/planet, creating a complex discussion on immigration, community, and democracy. It investigates what brings people to America and the obstacles, ironies, and triumphs they experience once they get here. Clothbound (with audio CD) \$35.00 ISBN 0-393-05737-2. Paperback, \$19.95 ISBN 0-393-32466-4

The Crossing the BLVD audio CD features text-based audio compositions by Sloan and Lehrer and original new music compositions by Scott Johnson which blurs the boundaries between music and speech, journalism and expressionism, tradition and the avant-garde. The CD, produced by Sloan, also includes music by Crossing participants such as gypsy-punk-cabaret band Gogol Bordello, Nigerian gospel singer Kingsley Ogunde, and Romanian-American musicians Christine and Dinu Ghezzo. Many of the pieces on the audio CD are included in the exhibition Sound Stations, which also feature compositions made specifically for the exhibition as well as radio documentaries produced by Sloan/Lehrer for Public Radio International’s *The Next Big Thing*. Several pieces on the audio CD have aired on NPR’s Day to Day program out of Los Angeles. CD(sold separately), \$15.00 ISBN 0-393-10588-1

The Crossing the BLVD performance: In this multimedia theatrical performance Judith Sloan “channels” a variety of interviewees. Judith Sloan is a mesmerizing performer, whose vocalization work and movement bring these characters to life. Their performance is illuminated by projected portraits of the subjects photographed by Lehrer, objects they have carried with them from home to home, landscapes and maps, along with an engaging soundtrack of original music, sounds and voices. As immigration policy is being hotly debated around the country in terms of national and cultural security, *Crossing the BLVD* presents the very human stories of why new immigrants and refugees have migrated to the United States and what their experiences have been since they came here pre- and post-9/11.

Crossing the BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America is published by WW. Norton & Co. and is priced at \$35.00 for the cloth bound edition (with audio CD), and \$19.95 for the paperback edition.

Crossing the BLVD: traveling exhibition of photographs and sound stations
premiered at the Queens Museum of Art, December 2003 through March 2004.
March 5, through May 7, Selected Images only: EXIT ART, group show OTHER AMERICA, NY, NY
March 11 through June 12, 2005 *Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, NY*
July 13 through November 23, 2005 *Hudson Museum of Art, Orono Maine*
Feb. 2 through March 12, 2006, *Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore MD*
July 30, 2006 through January 07, 2007, *Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY*
August 27 through November 10, 2007, *Art Museum of the University of Memphis, TN*
February 4 through June 28, 2008, *Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Queens College, NY*
October 7 through November 2, 2008, *Ewing Gallery, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN*
October 12 through November 22, 2009, *Weber State University, UTAH*
January 28 through March 26, 2011 *Urban Arts Space, Ohio State University, Columbus Ohio*
Selected Images February 14 through April 6, 2011 *Paul Robeson Galleries, Rutgers University Newark NJ*
Full exhibition August 29 through October 10, 2011, *Tyler Art Gallery, SUNY OSWEGO, NY*

The husband-and-wife team of writer, designer and photographer Warren Lehrer,
and actress, oral historian and audio artist Judith Sloan
are co-founders of EarSay, a non-profit arts organization based in Queens, NY.
Their reading/performance book tour continues throughout the U.S.

**For additional information and materials needed to review or report on *Crossing the BLVD*
and/or to arrange interviews and performances with Lehrer/Sloan
contact: EarSay at 718.784.4066 or info@earsay.org
and visit www.earsay.org**

ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

Warren Lehrer is a writer, designer, and photographer whose pioneering books and theatrical works celebrate the music of thought and speech, the complexity of character, and the relationship between social structures and the individual. His books, acclaimed for capturing the shape of thought and reuniting the traditions of storytelling with the printed page include: *The Portrait Series: a quartet of men*; *GRRRHHH*; *i mean you know*; *versations* and *FRENCH FRIES*. He has won numerous grants and fellowships, NEA, New York State Council and Foundation for the Arts, the Ford Foundation, etc, and awards including The International Book Design award, three American Institute of Graphic Arts book awards, etc. Lehrer is a Professor of Art at the School of Art and Design at SUNY Purchase, and a member of the graduate faculty at the School of Visual Arts' Designer as Author program. *Crossing the BLVD* is his ninth book.

Judith Sloan is an actress, oral historian and audio artist, whose multi-character solo performances combining humor, pathos and a love of the absurd include *Denial of the Fittest*, *Responding to Chaos*, and *A Tattle Tale: eyewitness in Mississippi*. Her work has been produced throughout the U.S. and abroad in such venues as The Public Theater, The Jewish Museum, the 92nd Street Y, and The Smithsonian Institution. Her plays, commentaries, and essays have been published by Second Story Press, the *Forward*, and the *New York Times*. Sloan is a member of the faculty at the Gallatin School at NYU where she teaches courses in documentary art, oral history, theatre and community projects. She is also the director of *Cross-Cultural Dialogue Through the Arts*, an arts mentorship and training program. Sloan won the BAXten performing artist award for 2005 the 2005 Third Coast International Audio Festival Short DOC commission for her radio documentary, *Tongues Twisting*.

Lehrer and Sloan are co-founders of EarSay, a non-profit arts organization documenting and portraying lives of the uncelebrated. Their book *Crossing the BLVD* is part of a multimedia project that began with storytelling workshops in libraries, community centers and schools throughout Queens, and includes public radio documentaries, a traveling exhibition of photographs and sound stations, a performance, and an interactive website: www.crossingtheblvd.org. As part of the *Crossing the BLVD* project, they also produced radio documentaries for Public Radio International's *The Next Big Thing*. The *Crossing the BLVD* project was supported in part by grants from The Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, the Greenwall Foundation, a Futhermore publishing grant; a program of the J.M. Kaplan fund, the Puffin Foundation, a V-Day Award, The New York Foundation on the Arts, the New York State Council for the Arts, and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Challenge Grant and the Queens Council on the Arts.

Crossing the BLVD audio CD

The *Crossing the BLVD* audio CD comes with the clothbound edition of the *Crossing the BLVD* book and is available as a stand alone CD. If as Lehrer says, “the book *is* the movie,” then the CD is the soundtrack. Original new music compositions by Scott Johnson (of *John-Somebody* fame) and text-based audio compositions by Judith Sloan and Warren Lehrer cross the boundaries between music and speech, journalism and expressionism, tradition and the avant-garde. All sampled voices are culled from interviews of “new immigrants” by Lehrer/Sloan on their three-year journey through the borough of Queens — the most ethnically diverse locality in the United States. Produced by Judith Sloan, the CD also includes music by *Crossing the BLVD* participants including the gypsy-punk-cabaret band Gogol Bordello, Nigerian gospel singer Kingsley Ogunde, and Romanian-American musicians Christine and Dinu Ghezzo. Beautifully performed and recorded, this CD is a rich and original musical soundscape that reflects the immigrant experience at the crossroads of a paradoxical and ever-changing America.

Crossing the BLVD CD: Executive Producer, Judith Sloan
Voice recording, Production, Editing and Project coordination by Judith Sloan.
Music composed and recorded by Scott Johnson, Gogol Bordello, Christine and Dinu Ghezzo.
Music produced by Sheldon Steiger. Mastered by Phil Klum.

Judith Sloan is an actress, oral historian, and audio/radio artist. The *Crossing the BLVD* CD marks her first endeavor as producer of a full-length work. Her earlier audio work includes plays, collaborations with composers and spoken word pieces. She co-produced the radio documentary *Eyewitness in Mississippi* based on her play *A Tattle Tale*, and with Warren Lehrer co-produced a series of *Crossing the BLVD* radio documentaries for Public Radio International’s *The Next Big Thing*. She was host of a weekly radio program on Pacifica’s WBAI in New York. An excerpt of her one-woman show *Denial of the Fittest* appears on the compilation *A Guide for the Perplexed* on Knitting Factory Records.

“Superb! A world view that sees comedy and tragedy as two bones of the same skeleton in the closet.” Sara O’Sullivan *The Scotsman*, Scotland’s National Newspaper

Scott Johnson is an influential voice in the “classical” tradition’s rediscovery of the popular culture which surrounds it. He is most known for his groundbreaking compositions which incorporate recorded speech and rock-derived instrumentations into traditionally scored compositions. In addition to works like *John Somebody and Convertible Debts*, he has written scores for the Kronos Quartet, Bang on a Can Allstars, and Paul Schrader’s film *Patty Hearst*.

“To these ears, the [Johnson’s] music mirrors the subterranean rumble, the welter of voices and other overlaid sounds of the city, with the cries of superamplified guitars hovering like angels above the fray. It’s a compelling marriage of rock elements and classical formalism that doesn’t shortchange either.”
Robert Palmer *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

“Scott Johnson has done what seems impossible for so many contemporary movie sound tracks; create a work that stands on its own.” Tom Moon, *PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*

Warren Lehrer’s first CD (co-composed with Harvey Goldman), *The Search For IT and Other Pronouns* is a musical setting of attitudes and longings for voices and instruments. Lehrer and Goldman also composed music for their own performances and for four museum installations by Margot Lovejoy. Several of Lehrer’s previous books (*FRENCH FRIES; i mean you know*, and *versations*) serve as performance scores and some have companion audio soundtracks. His book *Brother Blue: a narrative portrait* was released by Shambala as an audio book.

“The Search For IT and Other Pronouns is a brilliant, fantastic work. Absolutely riveting!”
Charles Amirkhanian KPF

What the Critics Say and Awards:

* **2005 BAXten Artist Award to Judith Sloan for her performances of *Crossing the BLVD*.**

* **2005 Merit Award** from the **National Federation of Community Broadcasters**, for *Crossing the BLVD* audio piece, *Cargo Flight to Somewhere*, which tells the story of Bovic Antosi's escape from the Democratic Republic of Congo on a Cargo Flight.

* **Winner 2004 Brendan Gill Prize from Municipal Art Society of New York** The prize is awarded annually to the creator of a building, book, essay, poem, lyric, song, composition, play, painting, sculpture, landscape or any other work of art which best captures the energy of New York.

* Winner Best of Best Award, Trade Photography, **New York Book Show 2004**

* Winner 2003 Innovative Use of Archives Award, **Archivist Roundtable of New York**. "For exploding the paradigms of oral history and reinterpreting them for our multimedia century..."

* Selected One of the Best Books and CDs of Indie Culture 2004, "A one-of-a-kind amazingly designed book portraying immigrant Americans today." **Utne Reader**

* Selected One of the Best Illustrated Books of 2003 "Innovatively brings to life the most diverse county in the country... An arresting, vividly printed mosaic." **Publishers Weekly**

"Immigrant life in Queens, as told in the intimate, rich, comic, ironic and sad stories so often seen but not heard in America's big cities..." **The Washington Post**

"An offbeat tour of one of the country's most ethnically diverse counties... Riveting stories about a new wave of immigrants to America..." **The New York Times**

"Truth isn't always stranger than fiction, but it can be a lot more interesting. *Crossing the BLVD* is a rich...varied listening experience, a demonstration of the way you can explore the world without leaving home. BLVD emphasises the rhythmic musicality of everyday speech. You hear laughter, sorrow and many moving tales of hardship, flight, splintered families and the difficulties of assimilation. A turbo-driven Eyewitness guide - and riveting first-person testimonies." **The Guardian, London**

"In the new typographical and geographical adventure *Crossing the BLVD*, immigrants from all over the world tell their harrowing, thrilling, inspiring stories..." **New Haven Advocate**

"An incredible, moving story... Oral history with a twist." **The World, BBC / Public Radio International**

"This stunningly innovative book goes beyond pathos, into the kaleidoscope of experience that defines real immigrant life, in all its complexity..." **City Limits**

"Crossing the BLVD boldly carries the tradition of oral history into the 21st Century..." **Eve Ensler, Author, The Vagina Monologues**

"A book of stunning originality, tremendous visual flair and cinematic depth..."
Alan Berliner, Filmmaker, INTIMATE STRANGER, NOBODY'S BUSINESS

"CROSSING brims over with the energy, heart and spirit that went into creating this important work."
Dave Isay, Documentary Radio Artist GHETTO LIFE 101, THE SUNSHINE HOTEL

"The significance of this extraordinary volume is that, ready or not it provides a glimpse of the new America which is emerging." **Ron Daniels Executive Director, Center for Constitutional Rights**

"BLVD brings alive the most polyglot place on the planet. An outstanding book on the new New York!" **John Kuo Wei Tchen, Historian, New York University & Co-founder of the Museum of Chinese in the Americas**

Best reward of all — Amy Li, Falun Gong practitioner and political asylee made copies of her story featured in the *Crossing the BLVD* book to help get her daughter out of China. After three years apart, Amy and her now eight year-old daughter were reunited at JFK Airport Nov. 8th 2003.

Stories in Crossing the BLVD: five movements

NEW PILGRIMS:

When Your Tongue Is No More Your Tongue: Inside a storefront church in the low income neighborhood of Far Rockaway, a Nigerian Pentecostal prophetess presides over a congregation of Ibos, Hausas and Yorubas — a mix unlikely to be found under the same roof in Nigeria.

Front Seat Brahman: A mystic/philosopher/poet from Bombay sees his cab as a sacred vehicle. Driving a customer to the airport, he ponders the difference between the road and the destination.

Six Women of Falun Gong: Lehrer and Sloan attempt a private meeting with the exiled founder of Falun Gong — who purportedly lives in a secret location in Queens. They end up getting to know six Falun Gong practitioners of the spiritual movement outlawed by the Chinese government.

Teachers of Import: In 1997, due to a severe teacher shortage, the NYC Board of Education began recruiting math and science teachers from Austria. By 2000, the program expanded to recruitment of English teachers from Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago.

Ten Deities in a Suitcase: A master of the ancient Charya Buddhist dance tradition rehearses in his apartment near the elevated subway. His room is so small, he has to rehearse by visualization.

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE:

Cargo Flight to Somewhere: Bovic Antosi escapes the Democratic Republic of Congo as cargo after losing his livelihood and family. He lands at JFK airport seeking political asylum, only to spend two years under detention in “Wackenhut,” a privately run INS facility next to the airport.

The Lhotshampas: Three Bhutanese refugees describe their experiences as members of an ethnically cleansed Hindu minority from a little-known country tucked between India and Tibet.

Behind the Strip Club Bar: Lana got her start behind a bar serving G.I.s during the war in Vietnam. A strikingly handsome woman, now a very New York straight-talking character, Lana supports herself and her Amerasian daughter working as a barmaid in a strip joint in Flushing, Queens.

The X-Ds: Three friends are part of a worldwide “family” of 10,000 ex-detainees who sued the estate of Filipino dictator Ferdinand Marcos for human rights violations. Ninotchka is an American Book Award winning author; Ira worked as a nanny until she became a union organizer; and Ramon is a real estate broker by day, political activist by night.

A Safety Place: Camilo and Juan Carlos concealed their sexual identity to keep from being killed in Colombia. They come to Queens and apply for asylum based on their sexual orientation. From their unique vantage point, the U.S. is a place where you must prove you are gay to stay in the country.

Out of Kabul: It took ten years for Shekaiba Wakili to get her family out of Afghanistan and into the U.S. Her aunt was en route to New York, Sept. 11, 2001, when the plane turned around and flew back to Peshawar. Shekaiba straddles her Afghan and American worlds with renewed interest in Islam.

TIES THAT BIND:

The Brothers Rahman/El Sayed: Two brothers, Ali and Moustafa, were the first Egyptians to open restaurants on Steinway Street in Astoria. While they enjoy their neighborhood, now a hot spot for

artists, musicians, and other Middle Eastern cafes, they ponder the pros and cons of gentrification and skyrocketing rents.

Goat Songs and Demon Elks: Christine Ghezzeo grew up in Queens with her Romanian-born mother and father who escaped under the Ceausescu regime. Her father Dinu is a microtonal, “contemporary” composer. She is fascinated by ancient Romanian folk music and Pagan traditions.

The Other Side of the Road: A husband and wife from Mexico come to the U.S. in the trunk of a car. They reflect on their lives as undocumented laborers and describe surprising judicial victories.

If There is No Dance, There is No Life: A family of Bukharan Jewish performers escape a war-torn Tajikistan, move near Queens BLVD, and go from dodging bullets to dodging cars. After eight years teaching dance in their apartment, the mother, Malika opens a school down in the subway.

The Christmas Card: A Romanian-born asylum lawyer opens a Christmas card that says “Dear Dad” and finds out she’s not an only child. Racula Oncioiu overcomes her feelings of betrayal and helps her secret half-brother with the legal papers needed to come to the U.S.

A World of Difference: A soft-spoken college student from Delhi, India, plays along with his parents desires for him to study a technical trade and have an arranged marriage, all while he collects everything related to the Butthole Surfers and dreams of being a radical catalyst for social change.

NEIGHBORHOOD STORIES:

No Bull: On an unsuspecting Father’s Day morning, the owner of an empty lot discovers his property is being used for a Mexican Rodeo and calls the cops, triggering the pursuit of a 2000 pound bull as it runs, horns-first past a terrified crowd on Northern Boulevard. The Mexican producers of the rodeo tell their side of the story for the first time, along with four eyewitnesses.

Asthma Alley: According to a 2000 EPA study, residents of western Queens get more toxic chemicals pumped into their air than the four other boroughs of NYC combined. Residents and workers in the area now dubbed “Asthma Alley” join forces with real estate developers and politicians to stop the expansion of more power plants. To no avail.

We Shook the Bridge: A Haitian activist who resisted the Duvalier dictatorships before and after moving to NY in 1968 leads demonstrations outside the Queens home of the former leader of a paramilitary force allegedly responsible for the murder of countless civilians in Haiti.

The Latimer Center: Three senior citizens from China tell stories of World War II, The Cultural Revolution, and acclimating to American life. They study English at a senior center servicing aging Chinese immigrants in a neighborhood of elderly Jews and Asians.

Labib’s Café: Five nights after the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, an Egyptian Coffee Shop in Astoria is smashed up by four young men at three o’clock in the morning. The cops grab the perps but the café owner decides not to press charges. An hour later the four guys are back!

UNLIKELY BEDFELLOWS:

Champion Ping Pong: A no-frills, second-floor, seven-table hall is a haven to several dozen professional and semi-professional table tennis players from all parts of the world. Anything that might ordinarily separate these people — language, ethnicity, hemisphere of origin — disappears when that 40mm ball is in motion.

Queens International High School: In a school where kids come from 40 different countries, cultural differences sometimes erupt in clashes, but usually dissipate over time. In the hallways, Chinese kids

learn Spanish, Hispanic kids learn Russian. Students in Sloan's theatre workshop are becoming more American than their parents ever will.

New American Democratic Club: Unlike previous immigrant groups who came to New York in the early part of the 20th century and later rose to political power, post-1965 immigrants come from so many countries, no one group can add up to more than a fraction of the vote. The New American Democratic Club backs candidates from Asia, Latin America, the West Indies and Africa.

Gogol Bordello: Eugene Hütz was heading up a river from Kiev towards Chernobyl the day the nuclear power plant sprung a leak. An atomic refugee, Hütz eventually came to New York and formed Gogol Bordello, a gypsy-punk cabaret band whose members come from Kazakstan, Israel, Sakhalin Island, Ukraine, and Queens. Eugene and band expound on the difference between multi-culturalism and multi-Kontra culture.

A few Crossing the BLVD story excerpts, in their own words:

Bovic Antosi seeks asylum in the United States —

“I am sitting on a wooden crate on a cargo flight to somewhere, I have no idea where. It is very cold in the plane and dark. I am cargo. I am secret. My angel is a Russian pilot named Melanov. The plane lands — where I honestly do not know. By the sounds outside I don't think there is a war going on. I'm exhausted of war. Melanov hands me a passport and visa with my picture and a made-up name. 'Go to the destination of the flight and you will be a free man. I give my boarding pass to the steward and see that I am going to JFK International Airport...”

Arthur Gulkarov, dancer from Tajikistan —

“Always my mother is with problems in her mind which is why she almost got hit by car crossing Queens Boulevard. The light says WALK, and you step off to walk and halfway across it flash DON’T WALK, DON’T WALK, DON’T WALK. The cars rush forward and many immigrants, they thinking, what I’m going to do with my life here? Smack, they get hit by car. A cousin from Tajikistan got killed on this corner. Two years later his niece got killed, exact same corner.”

Remi Ortiz, asking the Lord for protection of her Nigerian Pentecostal congregation —

“Father in heaven, I put your people before you. I pray for a shield over every one of them. I pray for the cab drivers, that you protect them from accident, from robbery, from receiving unnecessary tickets, and help them to keep their job. I pray for the nurses, that they will not give wrong medications, that they will not be sued or contract diseases... Holy Spirit, I pray against poverty, for those who are not doing well. I pray for those that are in business, that they will prosper, that they will be safe on the street, that they will not be pushed into the subway track, that you will shield them from bullets and police that misunderstand who they really are. Oh Lord, let no gunshots come near them, no guns shall come near them. I pray that this will be a week of favor, and by next week we all will have cause to give you glory... In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

Harjinder Singh, Sikh cabdriver/politician/entrepreneur recalls an early cab experience —

“American people are the best people in the world. Even the criminals are good. When I first came here I was driving a taxi cab, and one time a passenger put a gun in the back of my neck and asked me to hand over all my money. I gave him all the money from my wallet. \$13. He said, “You sure that’s all you have?” I said, “Yes. You’re only my second customer of the day, sir.” He made me empty my pockets, and then he abused me, “Oh, you’re a bloody poor fellow. I can’t rob you.” He handed my \$13 back, reached into his pocket and gave me a dollar. “Here,” he said. “This is to buy your coffee.” I let him out at the corner and thought, Wow! This is the most incredible country in the whole world!”

After 9-11, Shekaiba Wakili rediscovers her Afghan and Islamic heritage —

“Especially since 9-11, I want to know about things that I did not learn growing up. I want to know what does it say in the Qur’an about the role of women? What does it say in the Qur’an about Jihad? What does it say about how to be with your neighbor? ...I know I’m not going to find anything that says you can go blow up people. My kids are going to be quarter-Jewish, quarter-Christian, and half Muslim. When they come to me, ‘Oh, Mommy, somebody said Islam is a violent religion,’ I’ve got to be able to fully explain Islam to them, because I don’t want my children to learn Islam from somebody else.”

Lazarro Navarro, producer of a Mexican Rodeo —

“The bull story came out on the first page of every newspaper comparing the bull to the guy they shot in the Bronx because the bull was black. Reporters from all over the world were calling me. I didn’t talk to any of them. One paper said the bull hit an old lady. They said all kinds of things that weren’t true, like... the whole thing was a clandestine Mexican rodeo. They invented things just to sell more newspapers. [One paper] had a picture of a cow instead of a bull right on the front page. This is the first time we ever speak about what happened that day.”

Maly Fung, Queens International High School student —

“I didn’t know what an immigrant was until I realized I’m two times an immigrant. I’m an immigrant from Venezuela here, and I’m Chinese in Venezuela. I’d be three times an immigrant if we ever went to Hong Kong. In Venezuela I spoke Spanish at school and Chinese at home. The Hispanic kids made fun of the Chinese. They used to say, ‘Chinita con arroz. (Little Chinese girl with rice).’ I would yell back at them in Chinese, ‘What do you eat, shit?’ I never understood their insult because Venezuelans eat rice too.”

Ninotchka Rosca, author, and founder of Gabriela New York —

“You have a listing of so many pounds of coconut exported and so many pounds of pineapple, and at the very top you have so many pounds of female flesh. Twenty thousand women are exported every year from the Philippines, not just as sexual labor but as domestics and menial workers, and very often their employers require sexual service. That’s why we have all these women who kill their employers when they are raped. They think we Filipinas are so unthreatening. We are small women. We are always charming, as they say. But they forget that we have been at war for 400 years and if you push us too hard against the wall — we’ll bounce back and kill you!”

Eugene Hütz of Gogol Bordello —

“... the whole globalization thing leaves the public very confused. Because the same people will kill you for your Gypsy background, then they’ll go to the store and buy your record. On the one side: Globalization is a ridiculous-fabricated-by-marketing-heads concept that helps sell things people don’t understand. It’s killing the culture, watering everything down... On the other side: You have anti-globalization artists. And some people think we’re about being secluded in our own culture. It’s not about that. It’s about preventing the sameness of the world!”

Praise for Warren Lehrer:

“In Lehrer’s books... words take on thought’s very form, bringing sensory experience to the reader as directly as ink on paper can allow... [Once] considered too far ahead of his time, now the times are beginning to catch up to him.” Julie Lasky **The New York Times Book Review**

“Lehrer’s books defy conventional notions of writing and bookmaking... Collectively [the subjects of *The Portrait Series*] make up a riveting group of eccentrics... Their stories echo in your mind long after the sound of them has ceased...” Zoe Ingalls **The Chronicle of Higher Education**

“An Oracle of the 21st Century, Warren Lehrer proves that a book can be a movie, an existential visual feast, and a pastiche of literature and art.” **AIGA Journal**

“

One of the most imaginative and ambitious book artists’ of our time.”

Richard Kostelantetz American Book Review

“In the four new publications by Warren Lehrer... the implications of a new kind of literature are at last being pursued. [*The Portrait Series*] is articulated with enormous feeling and care by an author with an ear superbly

attuned to the cadences of spoken language. Lehrer, unlike so many contemporary graphic stylists, begins from a deep engagement with content he has created himself..." Rick Poynor **Frieze Magazine**

"Unlike many books of oral stories, which fall flat on the printed page, (*Brother Blue: a narrative portrait*) is so alive, so vibrant, that at times I was sure I was hearing the voice of this remarkable storyteller/philosopher... Absolutely Delightful!" Shanta Nurullah **The Bloomsbury Review**

"In Warren Lehrer's extraordinary books... reality, fantasy, along with art and literature, travel parallel but inseparable roads..." Philip Meggs **Print Magazine**

"Lehrer is a 21st century oral history, new journalism mastermind. Studs Terkel in cyberspace. More visceral than most biographies, *The Portrait Series* is an extraordinary set of books that allows you to physically hold the subjects in your hand as you read their eccentric, strange, dangerous and amazing stories." Mathew Finch **WBAI**

"Each book in *The Portrait Series* is a vibrant visual and narrative biography of an eccentric, prismatic and resilient personality... Riveting! Lehrer defies categorization." Linda Wagner **Gannett**

"The arrival of Warren Lehrer's *Portrait Series* is something of an event... echoes of Henry Miller... vivid evocations of family life and history... absolutely defining and unmistakable." Paul Zelevansky **JAB** (Journal of Artists' Books)

"Lehrer creates a rich soundscape in the reader's imagination... correlating the rhythm of language to the way the mind works... challenging the line between life and art." Nancy Soloman **Afterimage**

"The tastiest book this season and for seasons to come, *French Fries*, Warren Lehrer's latest tour de force is a remarkable accomplishment. Each page becomes theater and you are the voyeur..." Judith Hoffberg High Performance

Praise for Judith Sloan:

"Sloan is carrying on the oral history tradition. Unlike Studs Terkel and other practitioners of oral history, Sloan uses her talents as an actress to reenact her interviews rather than merely transcribing them." **The New York Times**

"Sloan wickedly skewers stereotypes... screws up her face with Lily Tomlin-esque elasticity. Plus, Sloan's a good juggler." Evelyn McDonnell **The Village Voice**

"Sloan challenges U.S. Foreign Policy, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, homophobia, and a host of other issues throughout an amazingly varied series of character-driven monologues." **Ms. Magazine**

"Deputy Sheriff Andrea Gibbs dared to break through the monkey order known as the 'blue wall of silence,' A Tattle Tale brings to life her saga in Judith Sloan's infectious solo performance. Her portrait reveals the unusual courage of a garden-variety conscience." Charles McNulty **The Village Voice**

"A welcome voice crying in the contemporary wilderness of political correctness. On-the-money satire seasoned with tolerance and joie de vivre." **Theater Week**

“In a Herculean, intermissionless opus, Judith Sloan delivers a provocative dramatization of a whistleblower’s attempts to expose police brutality and political corruption in Mississippi.” **New York Law Journal**

“[A Tattle Tale is] an important show, incredible research, very touching, often humorous. The story of a feisty woman, a wonderful play of social commitment and passion.” **Amy Goodman Democracy Now**, Pacifica Radio

“Funny and sad, topical and biting... Exquisite comic timing... best of all, Sloan can make you see your world in a slightly different way. And that’s what theater is supposed to do.” Marion Gamel **The Indianapolis Star**

“In listening to what people have to say, Judith Sloan captures the essence of their lives... She is one part Studs Terkel, one part Lily Tomlin, two-parts originality.” **The Herald**, Bloomington

“Superb! A world view that sees comedy and tragedy as two bones of the same skeleton in the closet.” Sara O’Sullivan **The Scotsman**, Scotland’s National Newspaper

“[Sloan’s] Denial of the Fittest is highly articulate, funny, intimate, sexy and very frightening.” Thom Dibdin **The Stage**, London

“A therapy of self in an era of hard-boiled reality. Sloan’s monologues demonstrate the capacity of words to bear their own freakish existence in colour and comedy. Ever accessible, a committed and persistent humorist who uses pathos as a mojo stick to make us laugh and think.” Ronan O’Connell **The List**, Glasgow/Edinburgh

Talking Points/Questions

Lehrer/Sloan are engaging and provocative interviewees able to draw on many great stories, anecdotes and reflections. Keep in mind, Judith Sloan is a character actress. In readings, performances and radio/TV appearances, she can and does transform into any number of Crossing voices/characters. For radio segments, the authors can suggest several cuts to play from the Crossing the BLVD audio CD.

- Why do you think Queens, NY has become the most ethnically diverse locality in the U.S? Why is your experience in Queens relevant to people in other American cities and towns, and people in other countries?
- What is it like traveling in your own backyard? What did you gain from it?
- How did you begin this project? How did you meet the people of *Crossing the BLVD*? What’s your relationship to the people you interviewed?
- What do the different “movements” in the book represent? *New Pilgrims? Run For Your Life? The Ties That Bind? Neighborhood Stories? Unlikely Bedfellows?* Can you give us a walking tour through some of the stories.

- In *Crossing the BLVD*, you define “new immigrants” as those who migrated to the U.S. after 1965. Can you explain that? From your observations, what are the differences or similarities between *new immigrants* and older generations of immigrants?
- You refer in the book to “the paradox of America?” What do you mean by that?
- Sept. 11th, 2001, landed in the middle of your three year period “in the field.” Can you describe how 9/11 and the “war on terrorism” has impacted some of the people you wrote about?
- This is not a typical book. Warren, can you describe the visual structure for this book? What do you mean when you say, your books attempt to reunite the oral traditions of storytelling with the printed page? The American Book Review said that you are “one of the most imaginative book artists of our time.” What is a book artist?
- Philip Meggs, the author of *The History of Graphic Design*, wrote that you [Warren] are an oracle of the 21st century. What did he mean when he wrote, “Warren Lehrer proves that a book can be a movie”?
- What is your photographic approach to the portraits, landscapes, and objects?
- What’s the difference between the hardcover and paperback editions?
- Judith, The Scotsman, Scotland’s National Newspaper said of your performance work — that you see “comedy and tragedy as two bones of the same skeleton in the closet.” Did that approach find its way into *Crossing the BLVD*?
- You both say that your work “crosses the boundaries between expressive & documentary forms.” Can you elaborate?
- *Crossing the BLVD* is not only a book, but also part of a larger multimedia project. Can you tell us about the other aspects of this? How did your approach to the audio CD compare with your radio documentaries?
- Can you describe the traveling exhibition?
- How has this project changed you?
- What is EarSay? What is the *Crossing the BLVD* website and Mobile Story Booth?