

## Keeper of the Beat: A Woman's Journey into the Heart of Drumming Award-Winning Documentary on Acclaimed Lesbian Drummer, Barbara Borden, to Air on PBS Stations



By Dianne Griffin

*Keeper of the Beat: A Woman's Journey into the Heart of Drumming* is an award-winning hour-long documentary on the life and music of Barbara Borden, the acclaimed and pioneering 72-year-old drummer, composer and teacher who lives in Mill Valley. It will air on PBS stations throughout the country during Women's History Month in March. *Keeper of the Beat* will be broadcast locally on KQED, channel 9, on Wednesday, March 19, at 3 pm and on Saturday, March 24, at midnight. The complete list of national airdates is online ([www.kobmovie.com](http://www.kobmovie.com)).

*Keeper of the Beat* tells Borden's inspiring life story in eloquent words and toe-tapping music. Filmed on four continents, it was produced and directed by three-time Emmy-Award winner David L. Brown and premiered at the 2013 Mill Valley Film Festival. Janis Plotkin, who programs the festival's documentaries, wrote that this was "the most enthusiastic, raucous, joyous and spiritual screening I have witnessed in more than 30 years as a film festival programmer."

*Keeper of the Beat* weaves footage from *She Dares to Drum*, Borden's autobiographical "percussion play," and other dynamic performances from the last four decades with interviews of noted artists, students, family and friends. The film tells the story of a woman whose love of drumming and music gave her courage, inspiration, and the drive to find connectedness within a widening circle of communities throughout the world.

We watch the unfolding of Borden's identity as she grows from a little girl in love with drumming to a pioneering woman drummer, a first-class percussionist and a world musician. Archival footage shows her career in performance, her leadership in drumming circles and peace and reconciliation projects, her teaching methods to bring drumming into all areas of life, and her exploration into the deeper cultural and ceremonial dimensions of drumming.

Born into a Jewish immigrant family, Borden was the kid sister of the show business Borden Twins, who performed as a novelty act on TV shows from the 1950s through the 1980s. Given a drum set by her sisters, Borden soon established herself as a hotshot "girl drummer," performing at the Hollywood Bowl and in nightclubs in L.A. and San Francisco.



Marriage and self-doubt led her to abandon her burgeoning career for "normal life." In the 1970s, when the marriage ended, Borden found herself in the middle of the feminist cultural revolution and the robust women's music movement as the drummer in a leading women's jazz band, Alive! The documentary captures the electrifying performances of the band with its rapturous audiences. After eight years of international touring, her five-women musical family fell apart, and Barbara once again had to face the conflict between her love of drumming and her doubts about her ability to keep the beat on her own.

Since then, Barbara has become a drumming diplomat and citizen of the world. We witness her drumming in the former Yugoslavia in the midst of civil war, and in Zimbabwe at a time of brutal dictatorship and economic collapse. In July 2008, Borden with her band Fools Gold performed in Abakan, a city in Eastern Siberia, as part of the Earth Spirit Theatre and Music Festival. The film captures the deep connection Borden developed with Tatiana, a shaman, during a life-changing ten-day eco-shamanism workshop.

Back in the United States, we see her generating joy with drummers at The Redwoods, a Mill Valley senior retirement community. We follow the engrossing story of how Borden gave a six-foot heart-shaped drum that had been made especially for her to a woman drummer of the Suquamish tribe. This gift clarified her life purpose as a Keeper of the Beat, whose drumming brings about group harmony, greater fellowship, and personal transformation.

A moving theme of the documentary is the importance of passing down the lessons, the love, and joy of drumming to younger generations. Home movie footage shows Borden giving her protégé Lotus her first drum at age one. The documentary concludes with a rousing version of "Sing Sing Sing" by Barbara Borden's Hearts on Fire Band that features the now sixteen-year-old Lotus sharing the drum kit. *Keeper of the Beat* provides a timely and uplifting affirmation of the power of music, community, joy and love.

In directing *Keeper of the Beat*, David L. Brown found "Barbara's message of hope, love, positivity, joy, gratitude and keeping the beat of all these positive values to be deeply inspiring. It's an especially resonant message for these challenging times."

*Dianne Griffin is an award-winning documentary filmmaker based in San Francisco. Her most recent documentary, "Painted Nails," follows Van Hoang, a Vietnamese nail salon owner, and her rise to activism. Check out [www.diannegriffin.com](http://www.diannegriffin.com)*