

## **Award for *Innovative Use of Archives***

*Recognizes an individual or organization for use of archival material in a meaningful and creative way, making a significant contribution to a community or body of people, and demonstrating the relevance of archival materials to its subject.*

### **Crossing the BLVD**

The *Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York* would like to recognize Warren Lehrer and Judith Sloan's *EarSay* organization for their remarkable project, Crossing the BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new america. Over a three-year period, Lehrer, a writer, book artist, and photographer, and Sloan, an oral historian, actress, and audio artist, interviewed over 100 individuals from a variety of backgrounds in Queens, New York – the most ethnically diverse county in the nation, where over 138 languages are spoken. Queens Boulevard, a twelve-lane expressway/pedestrian crosswalk traverses the borough. A hazardous, colorful thoroughfare, the Boulevard is at once divisive and unifying, embodying *the chaotic but polite choreography that is Queens*.

Inspired by both Studs Terkel and Zora Neale Hurston, this is not your typical, routine oral history project – in fact, its vertiginous manifestations are rather hard to define. First of all, there's the book itself, a stunning artists book designed by Lehrer, structured to portray multiple perspectives, containing excerpts of interviews, photographic portraits, and visual artifacts of Congo refugees, Indian taxi driver-philosophers, Guyanese ping-pong champions, etc. Then there's the accompanying audio CD, with Sloan and Lehrer's spoken word pieces celebrating the music of speech, composer Scott Johnson's new music compositions, and both contemporary and world music played by Crossing the BLVD participants. Moreover, the project has a performative aspect, with workshops and lecture-performances by Sloan/Lehrer, who are sometimes accompanied by interviewees at local museums, educational, and performing arts institutions.

Lehrer and Sloan also trained students and interns from NYU, Queens College, School of Visual Arts, and SUNY Purchase in a variety of skills: oral history techniques, transcription of audio tapes, and interviewing techniques. Students also assisted and apprenticed in photo sessions, translation of various languages, and design. Sloan/Lehrer (*EarSay*) also created an arts-in-education project with recently emigrated teenagers at the Queens International High School, using oral history techniques, theatre and writing. The results have been mildly revolutionary:

- The lives of new immigrants – all-too-frequently invisible in our city – have been captured and expressed with freshness and vitality
- A new generation of oral historians has been inspired and trained
- New Americans have been given tools to document of their stories, and are empowered to view themselves as part of the greater social fabric and history itself.

Lastly – for exploding the paradigms of oral history and reinterpreting them for our multimedia century – we honor Crossing the BLVD for its boldness and creativity as it charts a lasting record of this vibrant, diverse community in New York City – the new Ellis Island.

Crossing the BLVD by Warren Lehrer and Judith Sloan wins the 2003 Award for Innovative Use of Archives by the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York (ART). One of the largest local organizations of its kind in the United States, ART is a diverse group with members representing more than 160 public and private museums, libraries, and collections in New York City. This award is granted to one work a year, and recognizes "the use of archival material in a meaningful and creative way, making a significant contribution to a community or body of people, and demonstrating the relevance of archival materials.." In the case of Crossing the BLVD, the award is acknowledging the creation and use of an original archive. Past recipients include: Ric Burns, producer of the documentary film Coney Island (1991); The Jackie Robinson Foundation for a traveling multi-media exhibition (1993); The Skyscraper Museum (1998), and the Sonic Memorial Project (2002). Awards ceremony will take place October 15, 2003 in NYC.

Crossing the BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new America published by W.W. Norton, Sept 2003