

# Getting Music to Those Who Need It Most

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For the Journal

If you've ever tried to get a message to a famous (or even semi-famous) person, in particular a musician, you know that it requires an uncommon amount of energy and determination. The music industry employs thousands of people — booking agents, security muscle, marketing firms — who act as buffers. The idea is to keep you and me away from Mick and Keith.

Last September, after four years of trying to penetrate the layers of industry people surrounding Arlo Guthrie, a Santa Fe man named David Lescht finally got to the folk icon. With his long hair, scraggly beard, faded jeans and T-shirt, Lescht may have looked like just another fan and fellow '60s survivor. But he had a very specific mission in mind.

Lescht heads Outside In, a nonprofit that brings music into the lives of those detained in prisons, living out their lives in nursing homes, doing hard time at drug treatment centers. The



**MOVING EXPERIENCE:** Arlo Guthrie performs in last year's concert at the Delancey Street drug rehabilitation center in Alcalde.

determined director eventually talked Guthrie into giving a performance at Delancey Street, an area drug rehabilitation center. By all accounts Guthrie was as

moved by the experience as the residents. And Lescht has put in place a regular program of events at the center. Founded by Lescht five years

ago, Outside In sponsors more than 200 such events a year that target prisoners, the elderly, the physically and mentally impaired — anyone, really, who is confined. Due to extreme need as well as the success of his programs, more and more of Outside In energies are going toward at-risk youth.

Just last month the hip-hop group Spearhead agreed to play the juvenile detention center in Santa Fe, a space that houses both state and federal prisoners. The group approached the kids "in a way that was righteous without sounding like they were being preached to and told them they're in a dehumanizing situation, and that their challenge was to find a way to be human to each other," said Lescht. "I felt it was an indelible experience for these kids that they would never forget. It was a highlight for Outside In."

One-off events are exciting, and they make for good press. But Lescht has been involved with less dramatic but equally important ongoing programs, like guitarist Chris Abeyta's regular guitar lessons at the Santa Fe County jail and the Santa Fe Boys and Girls

Club. Abeyta is a member of Lumbré del Sol, a popular area Latin rock band. Lescht was instrumental in getting blues lady Bonnie Raitt's foundation to donate the 12 Fender acoustic guitars used by the kids. The idea is to build self-esteem through creativity and learning a skill, so that eventually some of these kids might end up in a concert hall instead of a penitentiary.

So why has Lescht dedicated his life to Outside In and not, say, stock brokering?

"To find the motivation you have to go back to the '60s," says Lescht. And to a band called Brotherhood that Lescht managed and played bass in. "We didn't want to get involved in the commercial music scene. We were really dropouts of that. The spirit was '60s non-commercial peace and love, and let's help the most unfortunate among us." Thus the musicians spurned commercial music outlets and decided to play at prisons, nursing homes, wherever music might lend a therapeutic hand.

In time the band, which Lescht said wasn't actually that good, broke up. But the strength of the

experience stayed with him through the years. In the mid '90s he decided to try something similar in Santa Fe, and Outside In was born. "I said, hey, why not give it a try. And it just sort of mushroomed from there. It came from a desire to do something positive and not worry about money."

The irony, of course, is that grassroots nonprofits end up doing just the opposite: spending inordinate amounts of time chasing dollars in order to survive. Lescht, who is the organization's only full-time employee, oversees a staff of volunteers. And after five years of presenting music to those who need to hear it most, he says that Outside In is standing on solid financial feet.

The man is full of plans. He hints at exciting things to come, not the least of which is an expanded commitment to local institutions and a big Outside In benefit sometime in the future.

To find out more about Outside In, write to P.O. Box 5714, Santa Fe, NM 87502, call 986-6054, or email Lescht at [outsin.com@aol.com](mailto:outsin.com@aol.com).