

# Chela Lujan

*Songwriter, Artist, Activist*

Created by Thalea Stokes



**Interview:** Chela Lujan | June 19, 2023 [View.](#)  
Soundscapes Oral History Collection [View.](#)

**Topics:** Songwriting; Punk rock music; Bluegrass music; Folk music; Music and activism

## Interview Summary:

Chela Lujan is a Pueblo-based singer-songwriter, musician, and activist. She recounts her childhood musical experiences hearing ceremonial Native American musics while growing up on the Diné reservation and playing punk rock with her siblings after moving to Pueblo during high school. After a short stint in California, Chela moved back to Pueblo where she played in a bluegrass fusion band called The Haunted Windchimes. After touring with the band for nearly a decade, she now is the front-runner for her own band, The Hardly Nevers. Locally, she has also taken part in social activism, such as during the 2020 protests of Pueblo's Christopher Columbus Monument.

<b>00:00</b> Introductions	<b>34:02</b> Race and gender in folk music
<b>02:26</b> Early musical experiences	<b>38:59</b> Songwriting and transitioning out of the Haunted Windchimes
<b>04:33</b> Living in Diné Nation	<b>42:32</b> Forming the Hardly Nevers
<b>07:58</b> Developing as a musician	<b>47:05</b> Art & the Columbus statue protests
<b>14:27</b> Early 2000s punk in Pueblo	<b>1:00:05</b> Current perspectives on music careers
<b>18:52</b> Finding an artistic voice in California and the Pacific Northwest	<b>1:03:27</b> Benefits and challenges of being a musician in Pueblo
<b>21:18</b> Joining the Haunted Windchimes	<b>1:09:01</b> Current work
<b>27:18</b> Developing the Haunted Windchimes' sound	



## Teaching Ideas

### **“Send A Message”**

Recommended Grade Levels: 5-12

This activity is intended to build upon Lujan’s extensive discussion about her punk rock roots and influences. Either as a class or in small groups, students will collaborate to write a punk song. Specifically, the lyrics should reflect an important or meaningful message that the students’ wish to express about themselves, their lives, their communities, or society. Through this activity, students will gain a deeper appreciation for the artistry of songwriting, the defining aspects of punk music, and the multitude of avenues for lyrical self-expression within various genres of music.

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduce Chela Lujan, highlighting her work in and influences from the punk scene. You may choose to play portions of the “Introductions” (0:00) and “Early 2000s punk in Pueblo” (14:27) segments of the interview video.
  2. Provide a brief history of punk rock.
    - a) This [timeline by Carnegie Hall](#) positions punk music within the larger history of African American popular music.
    - b) This [online article from Sound of Life](#) provides an overview and playlists of historical periods of punk music.
  3. Give parameters of the song-writing activity.
    - a) Lyrical content should reflect an over-arching, intentional, and meaningful message to express to either a specific audience or general audience.
    - b) Song should contain at least one iteration of a verse, pre-chorus, and chorus.
    - c) Songs will be performed with a punk-style backing track; play the backing track for students so that they can acclimate their lyrics to the musical texture [[Punk Rock Guitar Backing Track in C \(155 bmp\)](#)].
  4. Have students write their songs, assisting and supervising as needed. Students may work alone or in groups.
  5. Have students perform their songs for the class.
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## **“A Kid of Constant Sorrow”**

Recommended Grade Levels: 3-12

This activity is intended to have students gain a more thorough understanding of lyrical and harmonic structures typical in bluegrass and folk music, thereby connecting more deeply with Lujan’s extensive experience in writing and playing in these genres and scenes. Either as a class or in small groups, students will collaborate to arrange a school/age-appropriate parody of the song “I am a Man of Constant Sorrow.” Through this activity, students will gain technical knowledge and hands-on experience of what factors constitute bluegrass music.

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduce Chela Lujan, highlighting her work in and influences from folk and bluegrass music. You may choose to play portions of the “Introductions” (0:00), “Developing the Haunted Windchimes’ sound” (27:18), and “Race and gender in folk music” (34:02) segments of the interview video.
2. Provide a brief historical genealogy of bluegrass music.
  - a) This video from the *Smoky Mountain Source* YouTube channel is an excellent overview of bluegrass generally: “[The Complete History of Bluegrass](#)”
  - b) Kat Bula, the artist in this YouTube video, discusses the differences between bluegrass music and other similar genres of music: “[Bluegrass vs. other genres - what makes it bluegrass?](#)”
3. Give parameters of the song-writing activity.
  - a) Students’ lyrics should follow the rhythmic flow of “[I am a Man of Constant Sorrow](#)” for at least three verses.
    - The linked video shows guitar tabs situated atop rhythmic accents in the song. Students should try to replicate these accents as much as feasible.
    - For example, the second line of the first verse begins “I bid farewell to old Kenttucky...” with the “G” chord indicated above the “tuck” portion of the word. Students could write “I bid farewell to old Colorrado,” speeding up the “Colo” portion of the word and putting the rhythmic accent on the “ra” portion.
  - b) Lyrical content should be similar to those of “I am a Man of Constant Sorrow” but changed slightly/somewhat to reflect students’ general lives and interests.
  - c) Students’ songs can be serious or humorous in terms of emotional expression.



- d) Songs will be performed against either a “I am a Man of Constant Sorrow” backing track or a karaoke version of the song; in their groups, all students should sing the main lyrics of the song, and, in their groups, decide which members will be singing the different harmonic voices in the “response” portions of the song [[“I am a Man of Constant Sorrow” backing track](#); [“I am a Man of Constant Sorrow” karaoke track](#)].
  4. Have students write their songs, assisting and supervising as needed.
    - a) Play the original song once, and the backing track quietly on a loop as students write their lyrics.
    - b) Hand out typed versions of the original lyrics for students’ reference [[“I am a Man of Constant Sorrow” lyrics](#)].
  5. Have students perform their songs.
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## **“Heal the Land”**

Recommended Grade Levels: 6-12

This activity is intended to have students collaborate and address a major issue or point of contention in their local community, be it within their school setting, in their city, or a particular demographic grouping. Students will express their collective opinions to positively affect their chosen issue through music, thereby connecting more deeply to Lujan’s activist life and her efforts to affect positive change in her community. Through this activity, students will critically engage in local affairs and be encouraged to take stake in and begin to shape their own communities.

### **Lesson Outline:**

1. Introduce Chela Lujan, highlighting her activism work and how that is reflected in her music and musical performances. You may choose to play portions of the “Introductions” (0:00) and “Art & the Columbus statue protests” (47:05) segments of the interview video.
2. Provide a brief history of protest music in the United States.
  - a) Here is a video from NBC’s *LX News* YouTube channel about race-relations-specific protest music in the U.S.: [“Music of the Movement: Protest Music Has Long Been a Messenger of Resistance | NBCLX”](#)
  - b) An excellent example of a contemporary song that effortlessly demonstrates the roots and evolution of American protest music is [“Black Snakes”](#) by Prolific the Rapper and A Tribe Called Red.



- c) (For older students) This [Vox article](#) outlines the history of American protest music very well, **but do note, it contains language and content that may be inappropriate for younger students.**
  3. As a class, discuss local issues and come to an agreement on one relevant topic about which to write the song.
    - a) Lead and supervise the discussion, allowing students to express their opinions in healthy and respectful ways.
    - b) Keep the discussion orderly and focused.
  4. Write the song lyrics collaboratively with the class.
    - a) The genre of the song is left to the teacher's discretion, but it is recommended that the song be performed in the style of a folk ballad [[Folk Ballad Backing Track](#)].
  5. Practice and perform the song.
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### **Additional Resources**

*Links to additional websites, books, films, that explore similar themes*

Book:

*Punk Rock: Music Is the Currency of Life* - Mindy Clegg, 2022

Book:

*Bluegrass, Newgrass, Old-Time, and Americana Music* - Craig Harris, 2018

Online Radio Interview:

"The African American Folklorist: An Un-recorded Legend of Bluegrass" - *WKU NPR*,  
<https://www.wkyufm.org/arts-culture/2021-05-11/the-african-american-folklorist-an-un-recorded-legend-of-bluegrass>, 2021

Book:

*Well of Souls: Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History* - Kristina R. Gaddy, 2022

Book:

*Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism* - Eunice Rojas and Lindsay Michie Eades, 2013

### **About the Author**

Thalea Stokes is a scholarly musician, ethnomusicologist, and educator of diverse subjects to equally diverse audiences. Though classically trained on the double bass, Thalea plays a number



of other instruments that reflect her eclectic musical tastes, including piano, carillon, West African percussion, Mongolian horsehead fiddle, and banjo. Thalea is currently completing her doctoral dissertation that focuses on Mongolian hip hop culture and its effects on the cross-national relationship between Mongols in Mongolia and China. Thalea incorporates her ethnomusicological training in all of her teaching endeavors by acknowledging, understanding, and recognizing all musical cultures on their own terms within their own respective contexts, and relaying that information to all audiences, customized to fit individual needs. Thalea aspires to build and share her own ethnomusicologically-informed general music curriculum in the hope that any person can utilize it to become master musicians in their own right, and be more deeply connected with the environment and people around them.