

Eco-comedy Boomerangst and Eco-songs

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Many climate scientists recognize that a massive shift in thinking and feeling about our relationship with the natural world will need to occur if we are to effectively combat the climate crisis. They know that science will not be able to solve this alone, but that stories and other forms of art will be critical to shift the narrative from the dominant mythology of limitless consumption to sustainability. Climate scientist Elin Kelsey, in *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis*, writes, “We can choose the stories we live. We are shaped by the stories we tell. Hope lies in the capacity of stories to transform” (102). As a long-time social justice advocate and creative writer who knows the power of story to create empathy, I couldn’t agree more. However, getting the form and tone right isn’t easy. While it doesn’t seem too difficult these days to write a postapocalyptic nightmare, in my opinion these aren’t helpful for those already suffering ecoanxiety – and many are. A recent study found that, “78 per cent of young Canadians report that climate change is impacting their mental health.” (*Coping*)

We urgently need more action-inspired, uplifting storytelling on the climate crisis. Humour can be an effective and powerful tool to engage audiences and build purposive community. As Victor Borge said, “Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.” My response has been to write eco-plays and screenplays, including *Mockus*, an expressionist tragi-comic play which portrays a mysterious clown who helps a Mayor solve his city’s environmental and social problems. I was inspired by Colombia’s anti-politician Antanas Mockus, who helped transform Bogotá in the late 1990s using clowns and performance art.

My current play is the eco-comedy, *Boomerangst*. In it former high school rockers in a band called Intensive Care form a boomer retirement commune to get back to the garden of their youthful ideals. They dig up more dirt than they can handle before uniting and rocking out against a mining company threatening their land. I originally wrote it as a screenplay, then a teleplay, which is in development, but decided to adapt it to a stage play for the immediate impact that it might have in my community of Kamloops, B.C.. We narrowly avoided the potential eco-disaster of having a huge open-pit mine approved just south of the city. The play grapples with the universal bind we find ourselves in. No one wants a mine, a pipeline, or a dam impinging on them, and yet we continue to demand their energy and/or products. *Boomerangst* also recognizes that people are at differing levels of awareness of this crisis. How do we get opposing sides to listen to one another and cooperate on an issue that is humanitarian and earth-wide but has been politicized?

After completing the play, I realized that it needed music. My teenaged son and I revived Intensive Care, the name of my high school band, and we wrote *No Mine Land* and *Climate Crisis* and produced a video of the latter. I have since held community eco-song workshops to develop songs, like our *Salmon Run*, which we performed at the 48th Rally for Peace Social Justice and the Environment on April 20th 2024 at the local Farmer’s Market.



Figure. 1: George with sandwich board doing Guerilla marketing for **Boomerangst** at the Farmer's Market, Kamloops, June 2023. Image credit: Ben Johnson.



Figure. 2: Solar-powered, multigenerational Intensive Care plays **Climate Crisis** on the traditional lands of Secwépemc people (with their permission), in Deadman's Valley, devastated by fire in 2021. Image credit: Mastermind Studios, Kamloops.



Figure. 3: Boomerangst cast in Chimera Theatre's production at the Pavilion Theatre, Kamloops, June 2023. Image credit: George Johnson.

References

[Coping through climate change | Canada's National Observer: News & Analysis](#)

Kelsey, Elin. *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis*, 2020.

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[Climate Crisis - Official Music Video with Intensive Care \(youtube.com\)](#)

[George M. Johnson – George M. Johnson \(georgemjohnson.com\)](#)

[Salmon Run \(youtube.com\)](#)

[Victor Borge Quotes](#)