

# Spirit has moved local artist, minister

## Celebration Circles

■ **WHAT:** Rev. Jody Kessler hosts interfaith worship services, called celebration circles, on the second Sunday of each month.

■ **WHEN:** 7-8:30 p.m.

■ **WHERE:** Santosha Yoga Center, 120 Brindley St., Ithaca

■ **FOR INFORMATION:**

Call 272-0968 or visit [www.jodykessler.com](http://www.jodykessler.com)

By **ROGER DuPUIS II**

*Journal Staff*

**ITHACA** — Long before she was a reverend or a troubadour, Jody Kessler was a kid with a guitar.

Even as she was coaxing “Oh my Darling Clementine” from the strings in her Manhattan apartment, the young Kessler had no clue that those pre-adolescent performances would put her on the path toward a vocation of spreading hope and spirituality through music.

That path took a few twists along the way.

“People are surprised to find out that I did not study music at Ithaca College,” said Kessler, 48, who first came to Ithaca as an undergraduate. “I was a psychology major.”

The woman who now works as a performance artist and interfaith minister worked as a school-teacher until 1995, doing music on the side. That year, she finally left the classroom to pursue her dreams. In the decade since, Kessler has released four CDs.

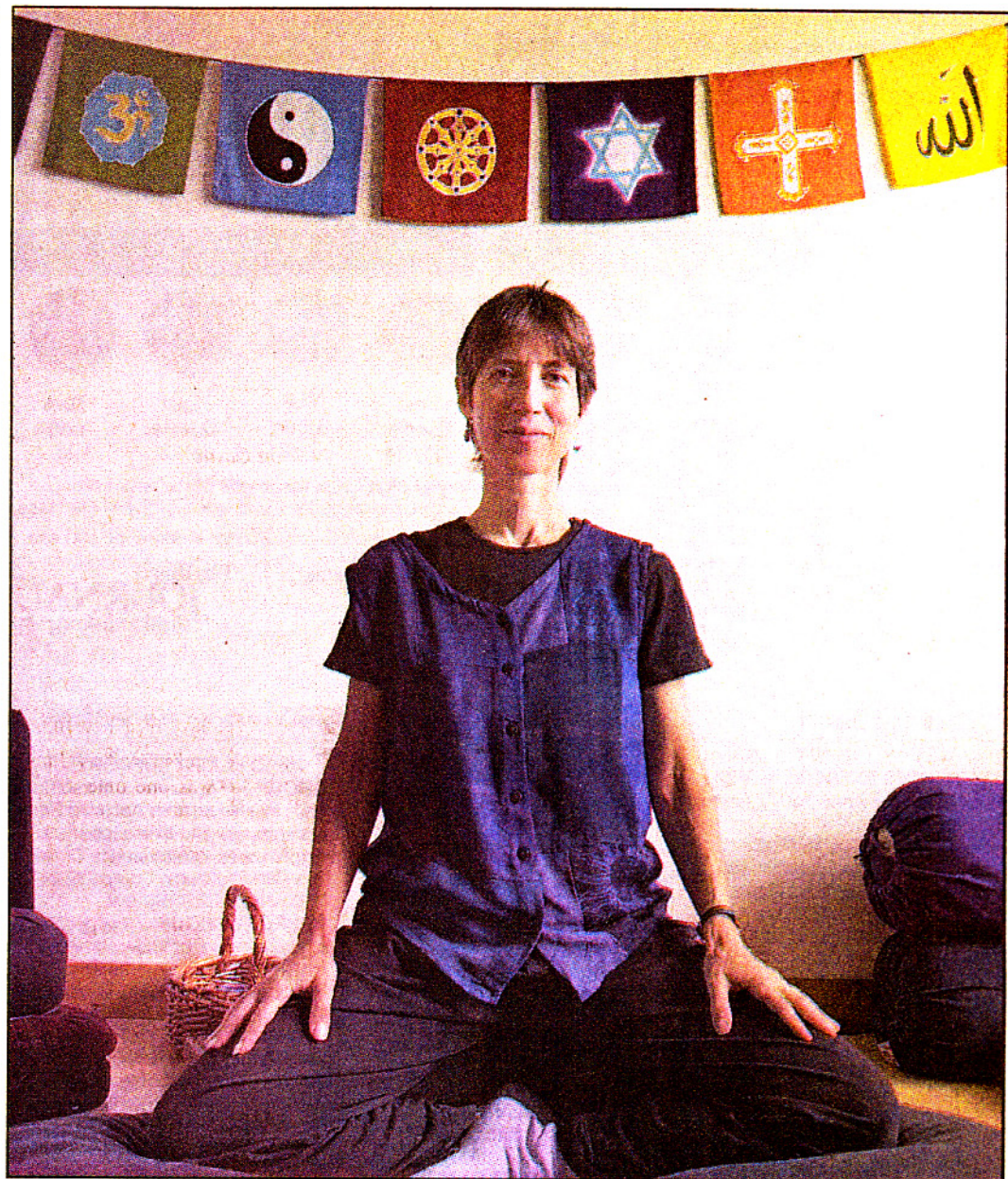
Her inspiration?

Folk music. Show tunes. Life.

“Obviously, Ithaca definitely influences what I do,” the singer-songwriter said. “It’s where I live. Most of my life experiences are here.”

Consider her songs.

There’s “The Moosewood Café,” a tale of romance blossoming at the downtown Ithaca eatery. Kessler’s “Big Boxes” is a reprise of the 1960s folk standard “Little Boxes,” which takes aim at Wal-Mart, K-Mart and other big box retailers. Then there’s “The Ballad



MATTHEW HINTON / Journal Staff

*The Rev. Jody Kessler is a local singer/songwriter and often meditates in her home underneath her interfaith banners.*

of Chris and Pat,” the tale of a same-sex couple who want to get married.

Initially, Kessler took her act to folk venues. The experience proved somewhat unfulfilling.

“People eat, talk. Music is kind of an afterthought,” Kessler said. “Even at the best ones, you have to compete with the cappuccino machine.”

She performed at a few progres-

sive churches, and it was there that Kessler started to feel she had found her niche. More than just being a captive audience, of sorts, she noticed that the congregants were listening to her words and pondering their import.

A case in point was her “Stone by Stone,” a testament to the power of forgiveness. That song, she said, has inspired people to tell her firsthand accounts of how it

led them to mend fences with loved ones.

“I felt really appreciated, and I felt like I was reaching people,” Kessler said.

Soon, some encouraged Kessler to think of her work as a music ministry. She ultimately took their words literally. Last year, she was ordained an interfaith minister

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## Minister

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through the New Seminary in New York.

Like her music, Kessler’s spirituality traces its roots to a collection of eclectic influences. “I was experiencing lots of different stuff,” she said.

Raised in a secular Jewish household, her work draws upon wisdom from Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Earth-based religions, Taoism and other traditions.

Her worship service themes include such topics as “Honoring our Divinity, Celebrating our

Humanity,” “The only Constant is Change” and “We are all Connected.”

While Kessler continues to travel widely and visit many different houses of worship, she has recently established a regular schedule of celebration circles, held each second Sunday at the Santosha Yoga Center in Ithaca. The sessions “weave together the most delicious elements of prayer, meditation and worship,” she says.

It’s a concept Kessler hopes will grow.

“I try to get people to drop out of the head and into the heart,” she said.

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