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## Variety show with a point.

### Secular, religious, antiviolence & delicious

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The World Cafe has hosted a lot of wild and crazy events, but seldom has it hosted anything like *Jesus, Bombs, & Ice Cream*, which strikes up at 7 p.m. Saturday.

Jesus? Bombs? Ice cream? All in one breath?

Well, yes, and that's the point. An impressive and surprising coalition of folks will be on hand to perform, present, and play. They're taking aim at the epidemic of violence in U.S. society, drawing a special bead on the Pentagon budget.

Ben Cohen, the Ben of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, will be there. Shane Claiborne, activist, influential author (*The Irresistible Revolution; Jesus for President*), and tireless worker in the streets of Kensington, will be there.

So will Psalters, a traveling collection of musician/activist/missionaries who are often a band (this summer they played in North Carolina and the Netherlands, among other places), often homeless ("unless you call our bus a home," says Psalter Scott Krueger, stage name Captain Napkins), and often a committed, principled community in Philadelphia.

It's a circus against violence.

Cohen, calling from the road, says, "There's going to be a little of everything. I will be doing some demonstrations" - reportedly involving Oreos - "that point out the size of our military arsenal, to make it easy to understand how our government spends its money and how we can redirect it toward peaceful uses. There'll be videos. There's a juggler. There's a welder." (That welder will "tie an AK-47 into a knot.")

The word *Jesus* shouldn't freak anyone out, says self-described "secular progressive" Cohen, a longtime activist much at home with the passionate, radical social message of people like Claiborne. So, while Claiborne will "talk about Jesus," Cohen will talk about dollars, war, and the Pentagon. And they will end up at the same goal.

*Jesus, Bombs, & Ice Cream* rows against a tide in public affairs in which religion and secularism have become polarized. Each side regards the other with suspicion and derision. Yet Cohen and Claiborne, secular exec and longhaired Christian street worker, are good buds. Blown away by *Jesus for President*, Cohen met Claiborne at the White Dog, "and really got

along," in Cohen's words. Soon, *Jesus, Bombs* was born.

Cohen says, "We said, 'We ought to do something together, because if we're really going to create change in this country, secular progressives need to work together with religious people.' "

Claiborne is a cofounder of the Simple Way, an "intentional community" in Kensington. In intentional communities, committed people, mostly but not exclusively Christian, live and work in poor neighborhoods. They don't publicly advocate, but they work to improve their neighborhoods. They aren't proselytizing so much as *being*. Actions before words.

Claiborne's writing has had impact not just among religious people, but also in the wider radical and social-work community. "We were drafted by injustice," he says. Dismayed by the plight of homeless people who in 1995-96 occupied the closed St. Edward the Confessor Church at the corner of Eighth and York Streets, he and others began the Simple Way in 1997. He says, with a faint chuckle, "Kensington is a place poised for the resurrection."

Intentional communities, and a related movement called "the new monasticism" - in which small communal groups live together, following Christian principles as literally and radically as they can - "grow out of a perfect storm we're seeing now, in Christianity and even beyond it," Claiborne says, "a whole generation realizing that the world we've been given is fragile and the patterns we're living need reimagining. We have to read the newspaper as well as the Bible. We see a growing movement that isn't just promising people life after death, but also asking, 'What's life *before* death, and how should we live *now*?' Violence, consumerism, the hunger for community - all these issues call to us. Christ speaks of the real stuff of earth: widows, orphans, just wages for laborers, and that's what we want to talk about."

Cohen wanted to talk about the real stuff of the earth, too. "I'm not sure we see our faith the same way," Claiborne says, "but we said, 'Let's harmonize our voices, Iraq veterans, Psalters musicians, let's create this little redemptive choir.' Ben has his side of it, economic, asking, 'What's the sense of spending \$250,000 a minute on violence? Will we let that define us?' That's the elephant in the room."

Krueger of Psalters is looking forward to *Jesus, Bombs*, which he calls "both lighthearted rally and an introduction to a real problem." He says that "Philadelphia has become a real center for this kind of work. When we play in Europe, in Norway, Sweden, places like that, people come up and say, 'Tell us what's happening in Philadelphia.' " Born in 1997, Psalters changes size and personnel constantly, he says: "I don't know how many people we have now, eight or nine, but over 100 have been involved." He says that Psalters is as popular at anarchist festivals as at Christian ones, and that concerts often turn into seminars on pressing human-rights issues. The band, which has a focus on refugee, nomadic, and indigenous peoples, is connected with Circle of Hope, an intentional network of small "cell" groups throughout the area.

Will O'Brien, special projects coordinator at Project H.O.M.E., says that while H.O.M.E. itself is a nondenominational outfit, "We've had a lot of contact with people in intentional communities in the Philadelphia area, and a lot of such work is going on here."

Cohen sees *Jesus, Bombs* as tapping into yet another current. "With all this talk of budget-cutting," he says, "you're hearing people talking seriously of cutting the Pentagon budget, for the first time since the Cold War." This, too, throws strange mates into bed, not only folks like

Cohen and Claiborne, but libertarian groups such as the Cato Institute, and even many tea party members.

Claiborne feels the moment, too. He quotes the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

"We can do better than spending so much on violence, so little on uplift, better than responding to 9/11 with more violence," he says. "That's what we'll be singing about on Saturday."

Psalters will do much of that singing, and Krueger says, "A rethinking is going on in the world. Maybe what it takes is for us goofy kids to settle in and continue the experiment."

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