



2023

Desmond Chris- Callison College One Pager

Chris Desmond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/callison-college-sis>

Recommended Citation

Desmond, Chris, "Desmond Chris- Callison College One Pager" (2023). *Callison College and School of International Studies*. 26.

<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/callison-college-sis/26>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Colleges and Schools at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Callison College and School of International Studies by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

My father was the chair of the Journalism school at U.C. Berkeley and every couple of years he'd relocate the family to different countries as part of the Fulbright State Department program. In 1965-66 we spent a year in Baghdad. In 68-69 it was Teheran, where I graduated high school.

Wendell Phillips who was instrumental in creating Callison College at UOP was a friend and former student of my Father's which is how Callison came to factor as a destination for me.

Try as he might to prep me for the foreign service or the news business, music had a grip on me from about 12 on. During that year in Iraq I turned 16 and experienced an inciting incident that convinced me once-and-for-all that music was the highest form of human communication generally and intercultural communication specifically.

I was playing guitar at this point and my sister and I sang together, mostly pop songs, Beatles etc.. Because of the music, an Iraqi couple, the former minister of transportation and his wife invited us to Ctesipon, (the 3rd Century Persian arch outside of Baghdad) where we were introduced to a legendary bedouin poet/musician known as 'the blind bard.'

We were taken to an elaborate bedouin tent near the arch, seated on carpets, provided tea and were nudged into exchanging songs with the bard. Now, imagine the ludicrous incongruity of a couple of early teens singing somewhat clumsy version of American and Brit pop to a master of high Islamic poetry who invoked god on a one-string goat skin covered Rebab. His music was transcendent and for me profoundly transformative. Ultimately, I'll conveniently chalk up the pedestrian attempts at political philosophy I delivered to Jerry Hewitt to that moment. After all, wouldn't you agree that political discourse is rendered somewhat feckless and hollow in the face of that vibration? On the other hand, perhaps that moment represented a more rarified kind of diplomacy. By way of a sweet epilogue, around 1989 I was flipping through the racks at Rhino Records in L.A. looking for some inspiration to help with a project I was scoring, I was shocked to land on an album of the blind bard's music and poetry. I still have it. Lastly, a tragic footnote. Sion Zilka, the former Iraqi minister who so kindly arranged that day, was (rather surprisingly) Jewish. Following the Ba'athist takeover of Iraq in 1968 he was hanged in the center of Tahrir square.

Chris Desmond