



INTERVIEWS

## The Rise of Breadwoman

An interview with performance artist Anna Homler.

By CHARLOTTE GODDU

**I**n 1982, performance artist Anna Homler put a loaf of bread on her face and became Breadwoman, a character who sang and chanted in an amalgamation of languages and sounds.

Although Homler eventually retired the guise, she continues to create music centered around chants and improvised language, and use everyday objects as instruments. In a [new documentary, \*Breadwoman Tales & Trails\*](https://youtu.be/ssf7fR5bfeU) (<https://youtu.be/ssf7fR5bfeU>), directed by Hazel Hill McCarthy III and Douglas J. McCarthy, Homler revisits her time as Breadwoman. New York-based record label RVNG Intl is reissuing [her recordings from the period](http://igetrvng.com/shop/rervngo6/) (<http://igetrvng.com/shop/rervngo6/>). *Lucky Peach* spoke with her about the project.

Can you talk about the compulsion to wear bread on your head? Can you

**explain where that came from?**

It was just really an inkling, do you know what I mean? I know today there's [a woman who smashes her face into bread](https://www.instagram.com/breadfaceblog/) (<https://www.instagram.com/breadfaceblog/>). I don't know if it's the same thing that moves her but, for me, at the time, I was just starting to do performance art and writing, and I was getting trained to notice the things I was attracted to. The things that I was feeling and seeing from the corner of my eye. It wasn't like, "Oh my God, I have to wear bread," but it was more like this feeling, *I wonder what it would be like to wear bread*. And it was a very sensual experience to hollow it out.

My early performance artwork was about food. Before I was Breadwoman, I did a performance where I did kind of a dance in beautiful cakes. It was called Cakewalk. It was in a place called LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) for a membership benefit in 1982. I wheeled out a metro cart that had the most beautiful cakes. I put them on the floor, and I did a little Mexican hat dance around the cakes, and I ended up stepping in them all. Smashing them.

My performance art was always about food. Other people do very political work. I wasn't so much drawn to politics as I was drawn to food. Food as a medium, as kind of a magical thing that's in daily life. Because all my work is really about finding the unusual qualities of everyday things.

Now I'm a singer, and I play objects that normally you wouldn't think of as art or instruments. I have a potato slicer that sounds like a small metallic harp. And I know egg slicers can sound very beautiful. Tonight at dinner I found this wonderful little serving bowl, and I can play it for you over the phone. It might not sound so wonderful to you, but to me it's very thrilling. It's like a bell! So that's what I mean. I'm interested in transformations.

**Can you talk more about how you made the masks?**

At first I used to use real bread. I lived near a *boulangerie*, and to me the bread always looked like faces, like heads. There's even a really beautiful poem by the poet W.S. Merwin, and it's called "Bread." He starts off, "Each face in the street is a slice of bread." But also the bread, anyway, reminded me of faces and heads. And because there were many, many kinds of bread at this particular French market, and they all looked like faces, I thought it was going to be a really easy thing to do, just to hollow the bread out, because it was the same size as my face.

But once when I was doing a performance, they didn't have my size bread. I

had to wear this huge pumpernickel loaf. It sounds funny, but it wasn't the right feeling for Breadwoman. So I decided I had better have a mask made that looked like bread. I thought, *I better standardize it, I better have the right loaf*. So I worked with a woman named Robin Wrightcheck-Martin. She was a costumer, and she made a costume for me that tied in the mask and the costume. So Breadwoman looked like a peasant, like a grandmother peasant. I imagined Breadwoman as a woman who lived in the center of the earth, who was so old that her face had turned into bread. She gathered the root sounds of all languages and sang songs. And that's how I connected it to the music.

**I'm interested in what it actually physically feels like to wear bread.**

Oh, it's really soft and nice! That's what I remember. I haven't worn bread for thirty years. And I just love how bread looks, because I do see that connection between flesh and bread. And then it becomes very hard, and it's like a stone.

I'm in Germany, which is the land of the *brotchen*. Germany really is the land of bread. Because they have all different styles of these little breakfast breads. I'm from LA, so what we have are muffins and bagels. If you're lucky, a croissant. But in Germany there are these little breads that are so adorable, and they look like stones!

**Do you think you were so drawn to the bread because you needed it in some way at that time? That bread was what you were hungry for?**

I think I was hungry for a metaphor. Aristotle said that the soul needs images—and I think I was hungry for a metaphor, for an image. Not an image like we use it today, like for PR or anything like that. But a symbolic image. Something that had depth. Something that had meaning. Something that was ancient. Something that was universal. And I think I found that in bread.



