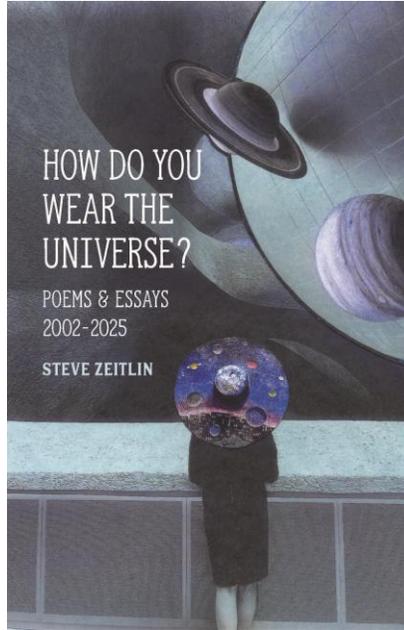


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How Do You Wear the Universe? Poems & Essays 2002-2025

Life-affirming and often humorous poetry and essays from folklorist, writer, poet, songwriter, ping pong player, and cultural activist Steve Zeitlin, the Founding Director of City Lore, New York's center for urban folk culture now celebrating its 40th anniversary. City Lore works with grassroots cultures to ensure their living legacy in stories and histories, places and traditions.

In 2002, Steve co-founded the Brevitas poetry collective, dedicated to the short poem. In 2007, he received the Benjamin Botkin Award from the American Folklore Society for lifetime achievement in public folklore. He has also served as a regular commentator for nationally syndicated public radio shows, and his commentaries have appeared on the Op Ed pages of *The New York Times* and *Newsday*.

Prior to arriving in New York, Steve Zeitlin served for eight years as a folklorist at the Smithsonian Institution and taught at George Washington, American University, NYU and Cooper Union. He is the coauthor of award-winning books on America's folk culture, as well as coproducer or codirector of a acclaimed film documentaries including *Free Show Tonight* on the traveling medicine shows of the 1920s and 30s; *From Mambo to Hip Hop*; *Deaf Jam*, about American Sign Language poets; *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy*; *Let's Get the Rhythm: The Life and Times of Miss Mary Mack*; and *In the Moment: Poetry Duels from Around the World*, with his wife, folklorist Amanda Dargan.

The Intergalactic Diamond Cloak

How do you wear the universe?

Does it drape across your shoulders
loose
or snug?

Are you lost in it?
Does it need some alterations?

Can you find some warmth in there?

Is it a tattered coat — thrown across your shoulder
or are you —
life-resplendent
in your intergalactic diamond cloak?



Steve Zeitlin

City Lore is deeply committed to the preservation and promotion of poetry as a vital part of New York's cultural heritage. The organization's mission encompasses the documentation, preservation, and presentation of urban folk culture, with a particular focus on poetry. City Lore's initiatives include the People's Hall of Fame, which honors grassroots contributions to New York's cultural life, and the People's Poetry Gathering, a biennial festival that celebrates literary and folk poetry traditions. The organization also supports the Poetry Dialogues project, which engages audiences in dialogue through poetry forms, including Rap, Spoken Word, and African jali. City Lore's efforts aim to give voice to the poets of New York's ethnic and cultural communities, ensuring that their artistry is heard and respected.

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REVIEWS

As the founder of City Lore, where the intriguing art of folklore is his bailiwick, and cofounder of Brevitas, where short poems are the *raison d'être*, Steve knows how to distill profundity into succinct yet meaningful verse. He also knows how to capture the shared universality of childhood memory; he knows the deep significance of love for family and friends; and he knows how to balance culture and mythology with scientific fact in order to make sense of the hurdles of everyday living. With his animated and optimistic outlook, he also knows how to offer us fluorescent light through the inevitable torrents of murk this life presents.

— **Cindy Hochman**, founder of “100 Proof” Copyediting Services, poet, and longtime editor of *First Literary Review-East*

Full of people, curiosity and interest, wordliness and humor, these engaging poems span a lifetime of listening and observation, and love in all its forms. Steve Zeitlin’s poetry collection shows us how life should be lived.

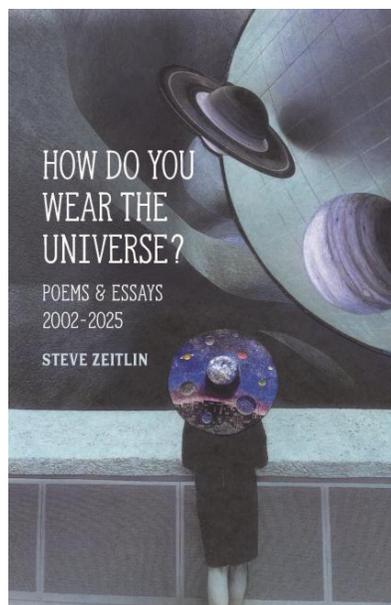
— **Esther Cohen**, poet and novelist

Whitman may contain multitudes, but only Zeitlin puts on his poet’s outfit every morning and says he’s wearing the universe. That’s *uni* (one) plus *verse* (poem), which sums up his philosophy — life is nothing but one big ol’ poem that everybody just keeps on writing. The emperor may have no clothes, but remember — the poet is wearing the universe.

— **Bob Holman**, poet, producer of *The United States of Poetry*

Steve Zeitlin’s book confirms his role as the spiritual founder of the Brevitas School of Poetics, combining Beat Generation passion for mutual support and authenticity with New York School fun with collaboration and styles, with a baby boomer ADHD short-attention-span celebration of the short poem, and finally the George Washington cherry tree school of poetics. Steve cannot tell a lie: all cultures are created **equal**.

— **Zev Shanken**, poet and teacher



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