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## Sustainable Music

by [Patti Guthrie](#), [Bob Waite](#)



We're putting more of our passion for sustainability, economy and environmental stewardship into our songs," Debra Lee said. Rick Denzien, the other half of their duo Lyra Project, added, "We were on our way to a protest in a diesel-powered bus when we suddenly realized we were part of the problem." Their new song Promised Land has lyrics expressing their frustration with the way things are: "In the land of good and plenty, you can buy your dream if you have the money. You can buy your dreams in the promised land."

These two energetic artists are involved in every aspect of the music industry. They perform, both individually and as a duo, write songs, teach piano, guitar, voice and songwriting, and

they mentor others. They also have their own independent record label called Slot-1, with distribution through The Orchard-Sony, and they also have a complete recording studio in their home. In addition Rick produces others' recordings, along with their own music.

Debra and Rick achieved radio airplay and won awards. And they've worked with nationally known music figures such as Justin Guarini, R & B gospel singer Jamie Knight, bandleader Paul Shaffer and his drummer Anton Figg.

Lyra Project songs like Promised Land are hard to classify. Some call them alternative pop. Rick prefers extreme folk music, "We try to find common ground, unite people. There's no divide. We're them. And they're us. It's about starting conversations."

Debra grew up in Quakertown, "I started playing the piano at age four, picking out nursery rhymes." She earned her B.A. at West Chester University studying music and piano pedagogy and is accredited to teach vocal as a Voiceworks™ Associate.

Rick is from western New York and received his B.A. in Religion, Philosophy and Psychology from Roberts Wesleyan University in Rochester. "I always was playing with tape recorders as a kid," he said. Early in his teen years, he began trying to learn guitar. "Suddenly I got it! I think being able to play guitar has to do with coordination that many kids don't have until they're between thirteen and sixteen." Also, he was part of a music engineering program at Fredonia State College and started a singer/songwriter group, "We were there on weekends and learned together." He added, "A recording studio ruined one of my master tapes. That's when I decided to start my own studio."

They met at a gig in 1998. Rick said, "We were at a release party for a compilation CD of various artists I'd produced. Debra was a featured performer that evening and was on stage. Our eyes met. And it was love at first sight." They've been together ever since and in 2001 purchased their home in Ambler. As their passion for sustainability grows, as reflected in their songs, they've taken concrete steps to put into practice what their lyrics preach.

After that "ah ha" moment on their way to the protest, they bought an electric vehicle and now have a fully functioning charge station on their property. Rick explained, "Anyone with an electric car can visit the website [www.plugshare.com](http://www.plugshare.com) to find out where charge stations are located. We've had people from all over the country come here to charge their vehicles. While here, they go into town and spend their money on food, shopping or whatever. By setting up charge stations, towns reap the benefits of the electric car industry. It's a win-win for everyone." He added, "When we travel, we specifically go to places with charge stations and spend our money locally." Debra said, "It isn't difficult to make the change from gas to electric. Most people don't know how easy it is."

They also converted their furnace from natural gas to electric, initially using an electric oven they purchased from Craig's List for \$25. And, they're in the process of going solar with panels installed on their roof.

They're active members of the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of Nashville Songwriters Association International, Debra being the Chapter Coordinator. She explained, "NSAI is an advocacy organization promoting networking and songwriting through workshops on songwriting and the music business, as well as hosting performing events." This past May,

she and three other women performed at the Wissahickon Library in Blue Bell at the "Singer-Songwriter—Women in Song" concert.

They promote their music through "grass roots marketing," including hosting concerts in their home and performing at others' house concerts. They recently did a benefit for the Ambler Food Co-op, of which they're members. And, this June, they opened for headliner IDLEWHEEL, the duo of Craig Bickhardt, #1 Billboard songwriter, and Jack Sundrud of Poco. They call their touring schedule the Drive No Evil Tour. To find out about their upcoming events, you can visit [www.ThriveStation.com](http://www.ThriveStation.com). The summer and fall schedule is up and includes performances by them with other talented regional and nationally known artists.

As Debra and Rick continue using their music to send a message of environmental stewardship, economy and sustainability through the power of our dollars, they have a full plate between making music, teaching, recording and promoting. And, they're planning to start a singer-songwriter music festival and conference next summer. "We want to take the music into local clubs with six to eight singer-songwriters in each," said Rick. "We also will offer professional workshops and have veterans available to help 'newbies'." Regardless of the festival's success, one thing is certain: Rick and Debra as Lyra Project will continue making meaningful music together for years.

To find out more about these talented artists, visit [www.RickDenzien.com](http://www.RickDenzien.com), [www.DebraLee.com](http://www.DebraLee.com) and [www.LyraProject.com](http://www.LyraProject.com).

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