

# Concert for Equality

## Legendary Lineup Takes on Activist Issue

MollyMisek

As indie rocker Conor Oberst crooned the soulful lyrics of his “Coyote Song” into the microphone on July 31 in downtown Benson, the crowd in front of him swayed to the slow beat of the politically-charged track.

“Loving you is easy, I can do it in my sleep; I dream of you so often, it’s like you never leave,” he sang in his signature shaky style, allowing the song’s message resonate with the audience members.

Junior Emily Fischer stood just a few yards from Oberst,

pondering the soulful lyrics. Her first concert experience was going well thus far – after performances by a couple of local bands, Flowers Forever and Vago, Oberst had gotten on stage and played a few of his better-known songs before hitting the mark with “Coyote Song.”

“But you’re gone below the border with a nightmare in between, so I’m sending the coyote to bring you back to me.”

What was Oberst’s “mark?”

Judging by the name of the festival, Concert for Equality, his aim was to make things fair. Fair for whom, exactly?

Immigrants, according to Oberst’s website. As the official concert poster reads, “All proceeds to benefit ACLU Nebraska’s effort to repeal Fremont’s anti-immigrant law.”

The outdoor show was organized by Oberst, the indie darling of Omaha’s Saddle Creek Records. Concert-goers filled

the main street and alleyways of Benson to catch performances of Cursive, Gillian Welch, The Envy Corps, and at the end of the night, the long-awaited Desaparecidos. A complementary lineup including The So-So Sailors and Lullaby for the Working Class was featured at The Waiting Room, also in Benson.

Proceeds from the tickets sold went to the American Civil Liberties Union, which is organizing a lawsuit against an ordinance recently passed in Fremont.

As Fischer explained, “If people in Fremont hire

or rent homes to illegal immigrants, they can be punished for helping people who aren’t legal.” The ordinance bans any undocumented immigrants from living or working in the city.

Many activists – Oberst and his concert companions included – view the newly-instituted law as racist, claiming that it promotes inequality, racial bias and paranoia.

While at the Concert for Equality, audience members had the chance to further inform themselves about the issue of immigration.

“They had different groups there spreading awareness, asking people to make phone calls to the government saying that this had to change,” Fischer said.

By handing out pamphlets of information and stickers saying “What happens in Arizona stops in Arizona,” the performers and advocates of the cause not only protested the new Fremont law but national decisions on immigration.

For many indie-rock fans, this was the show of the summer. It featured one of the most legendary lineups of the year, not to mention one of the most controversial issues in our nation’s history.

As Emily Fischer stood listening to Oberst sing his carefully-crafted lyrics, journalist Tim McMahan also lingered near the stage, watching the same artist perform the same song.

However, a different thought was running through his mind.

Tim found himself wondering if most of the audience was just here to view these historic performances, not to join in any particular revolt against immigration laws.

As McMahan, indie aficionado and reporter for Omaha’s The Reader, put it, “I don’t think that a lot of people were there because of the cause; they were there to see these bands.”

To the man with twenty years of experience with the Omaha music scene under his belt, it seemed as though Fremont was

an after-thought in many of the audience members’ minds.

“It was such a rare situation to see these bands perform when some of them literally hadn’t performed in years,” McMahan said. How could the immigration issue possibly compete with the lineup?

Judging by the roaring response of the crowd after Desaparecidos’s stint on stage,

most die-hard music fans would agree with McMahan.

Still, a few Marian attendees beg to differ.

“In the beginning, I didn’t support the anti-immigration law because it was legalizing discrimination,” sophomore Morgan Harms said. “Then after I went to the concert, I thought more about the actual people and the humanity in the subject.”

Harms, who initially went to the show to catch performances by Bright Eyes and Desaparecidos, spoke about the defining moment of the concert for her. A girl whose mother was recently deported to Mexico stepped up to the mic to tell her immigration story, as well as sing a folksy ballad in Spanish.

“That’s when the whole thing really sank in. Everything I was supporting made a lot more sense to me,” Harms said, as sophomore Kate Johnson nodded beside her.

“It tied me to the cause and made it personal,” Johnson added. Harms and Johnson attended the concert together, and both went home with a changed perspective

by the end of the night.

Both girls realized what a large – and largely ignored – issue immigration is among teenagers.

“I think everyone has the capacity to open their eyes and realize what’s happening and not just live

with the mentality of ‘Oh, I’m young; I have time,’” Harms said.

Junior Kayleigh Lewandowski, who also went to the show, realized the importance of being educated about the issue of immigration.

“I don’t think nearly enough teens care enough about immigration politics in general unless they are touched personally. It’s like that with a lot of issues. Most of us are going to be voting in 2012, and it scares me to think that a bunch of kids who don’t care could possibly vote.”

Fischer, who left with a new mindset as well, agreed wholeheartedly.

“Once upon a time, all Americans were immigrants at sometime,” Fischer said.

“Teenagers have a great voice and the power to make a difference. Just because we’re young, we shouldn’t let that affect what we do.”

So, was Tim McMahan wrong in asserting that the performances trumped the cause of the Concert for Equality?

Or did he just have a different perspective on it? After all, a middle-aged music expert’s opinions are more molded than those of a teenager.

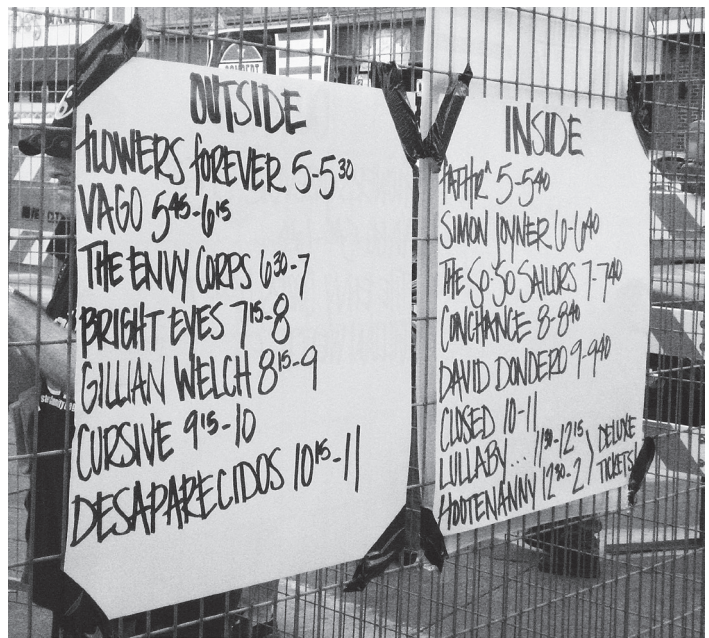
Perhaps the Marian girls’ prior inexperience with immigration contributed to the sense of awareness they gained from the concert, whereas McMahan attended the show primarily with a musical aspect in mind. And perhaps the other concert-goers who seemed jaded were simply already aware of the current issues surrounding immigration.

Regardless of what any one person took from the Concert for Equality, its outcome was positive, and its message came across: indie music and activism go hand in hand.



**Dressing for the Occasion.** A concertgoer at the Concert for Equality displays his views in a unique way.

Photo courtesy of Emily Fischer.



**Two Times the Indie.** A poster of the lineup hangs outside the entrance to the concert. A dual show played both outdoors and inside The Waiting Room. Photo courtesy of Emily Fischer.

## All About Oberst

The many faces of the main man

Graphic by Molly Rakoczy  
Photo courtesy of Emily Fischer

**Student:**  
Attended St. Pius X/St. Leo and Creighton Prep.

**Listener:**  
Musical influences are The Cure, David Dondero, Neil Young, and Elliot Smith.

**Political Figure:**  
Put on the Concert for Equality in partnership with the American Civil Liberties Union.

**Trendsetter:**  
Is a leader in the indie music scene in Omaha. Founded Saddle Creek Records.

**Musician:**  
Began his musical career at age 13. First band, Commander Venus, was established while he was in high school. Has been a member of Bright Eyes, Desaparecidos, The Mystic Valley Band and Monsters of Folk.

# Broken Trust: Fremont Teen's Perspective on the New Ordinance

KayleeAsche

Seventeen-year-old Fremont High senior Britt Jensen has a strong opinion on immigration. After all, he's an immigrant himself. His family moved from just outside the Twin Cities to the small town of Fremont when he was in sixth grade, so he knows what it feels like to be a newcomer in a strange world.

Even though he isn't the kind of immigrant currently making national headlines, he still has a lot to say on the new ordinance taking Fremont by storm.

Home to 25,000 people, Fremont's smaller size creates a homey atmosphere for citizens. But that sense of security and trust has turned into one of fear and confusion ever since the Fremont ordinance came about.

Jensen lives right in the middle of all the chaos yet manages to carry on with his normal routine. When he's not busy running four miles in the humidity after school or singing in the choir, he's actively participating in the youth group at his church or playing the

baritone in the school band.

Although Jensen is not a huge fan of politics, he is strongly against the Fremont Ordinance, which, in short, states that landlords and employers cannot rent to or hire illegal immigrants. Even though he hasn't heard of the Concert for Equality, he is able to provide his own well-formed arguments on the matter at hand.

Jensen doesn't understand why there has been such a large movement to pass anti-immigration laws in Fremont. After all, only 350 Fremont citizens are said to be undocumented.

Furthermore, Fremont has a low percentage of Hispanics, and everyone he personally knows is legal. As Jensen said, "There are bigger issues in Fremont that we should be looking at."

Jensen also believes that the new law is biased. "It seems very racially driven—a target for illegal immigrants." He suspects that minorities might not feel welcome in

Fremont due to the ordinance. "It's kind of turned into whites versus Mexicans," Jensen said.

According to Jensen, the issue of illegal immigration is motivated mostly by paranoia and racism rather than protecting American citizens. "It's the fear and hesitancy people have when they are around people of another ethnicity. It really shouldn't be a huge deal," he said. "There are many citizens in support



**No Entry.** A for-rent sign sits outside a local Fremont home. According to the new ordinance, an illegal immigrant would not be able to rent houses like this. Photo by MollyMisek

of the ordinance who took technically correct information and manipulated it in such a way that it came out to be misleading and not necessarily true."

Jensen is not the only one who feels this way. The controversy surrounding the ordinance is a regular topic of discussion within his family. Jensen's father was the leader of the Ministerium, a group of pastors from every major church in Fremont protesting the ordinance.

Although Jensen's family is very vocal about the ordinance, he also believes that teenagers should be more aware of this issue.

"If this ordinance does pass, we will be the ones suffering the unforeseen consequences and political battles," Jensen said. "It wouldn't hurt to get more facts out to the younger population."

Jensen mentioned that many locals were complaining about the amount of money Hispanics and illegal immigrants without health care were receiving from Fremont Medical Center. In reality, the dollar amount they received was in the hundred thousands while Caucasians without health care received billions of dollars altogether.

"Once you realize they [people of different minorities] aren't all that different from you, there won't be such a problem." This is something Jensen believes all of us should remember: we are all human, no matter what skin tone we are.

## Mistaken Identities:

### Confusion Over Marian Girls' Ethnic Backgrounds

See if you can match these students with their true ethnicities.

1 Erin Fitzsimmons,  
Junior

2 Veronica Hill,  
Junior

3 Kelly Cunningham,  
Sophomore

4 Sami Ray,  
Senior



Mistaken as:  
Hawaiian

Mistaken as:  
Greek

Mistaken as:  
Chinese

Mistaken as:  
African American

a) Mexican

b) Cuban

c) Japanese & Irish

d) Korean

Answers: 1)c, 2)a, 3)d, 4)b

Graphic by Molly Misek

## Q&A with Matt Maginn from the band Cursive

MollyMisek

Since establishing their musical prowess more than a decade ago, members of the Saddle Creek hotshot band Cursive have entertained a nationwide fanbase with their unpredictable, alternative rock sound. Bassist Matt Maginn lends his thoughts about the Concert for Equality to the Network staff.

### How did you first get involved with the Concert for Equality?

Conor and I are pretty close friends, and one day, he was just throwing the idea around. I said "Yeah" right away because I thought it'd be good to help out. I think it came together really well.

### Are you particularly involved with the

### issue of illegal immigration?

Not before this year, until they started making these bizarre, potentially racist laws and encouraging a weird form of racism. It wasn't until it attracted a lot of attention that I really got into it.

### Did you notice anything different about this concert?

In my mind, there was definitely something more familial and positive about this. All the bands were having fun and talking to each other, and there was a lot of camaraderie. It was very different. I'd like to do something like it again, but maybe with a different cause.

### Do you feel the audience thought deeply

### about the message the concert was trying to convey?

I think that's not something you can generalize, just because each person is his or her own thinker. I guarantee there were some people who just wanted to hear some music which is great, but I don't think you could say everyone there was or everyone there wasn't interested.

### Are there any other issues you're passionate about that you would be willing to put on another concert for?

Anything that supports equality and fair treatment. I think the idea of neglecting someone is inappropriate.

### What would you say was the most memorable moment of the whole show?

Well, I played bass for Bright Eyes and there was a moment where I made a mistake, so that was pretty memorable. That was my only bad memory. In general, there were a lot of good things going on. When the young woman got up and sang, I think that was the most important part of all of this. It showed the human side of what's going on, not just a bunch of rhetoric and slogans. It was an important component of the night.

For the full interview, visit the online edition of The Network at [www.omahamarian.org/netpaper](http://www.omahamarian.org/netpaper)

## Immigration Through the Years

