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COMMUNITY

Swap-O-Rama-Rama turns consumers into creators

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Last month I went to Los Angeles' first Swap-O-Rama-Rama at the Shrine Auditorium. I love the giggly gals/free clothes/recycling combination of a clothes swap. A Swap-O-Rama-Rama does it one better though. It's a clothes swap combined with a day of DIY workshops.

The Swap-O-Rama-Rama was held upstairs from the annual [Bazaar Bizarre](#), which bills itself as "Not your granny's craft fair." The price of entry was a bag of unwanted clothes and \$5. Once inside, I was invited to dig through hundreds of items of clothing brought by other participants, sorted into colorful piles of men's shirts, women's pants, accessories etc., and take whatever I wanted.

"It's really all free?" someone asked me with giddy disbelief. "Oh, yes. Dig in! It's the ultimate recycling!"

But that was only stage one. After finding a pile of treasures, participants were invited to visit one of the ten crafting stations led by knowledgeable seamstresses, costume designers and DIY mavens who generously volunteered to provide free lessons in modifying and embellishing clothes.

Lori Petitti, the organizer of the event said, "The whole message of Swap is to turn consumers into creators by uniting them with DIY enthusiasts. Wendy Tremayne, the founder of Swap-O-Rama-Rama, was appalled by the textile waste generated in our country. Swap grew out of her concern to address an industry that encourages us to consume mass amounts of textiles when instead we should be recycling them for the health of the planet.

Sharon Astyk, writer on energy issues and a self-described knitting addict, recently put out a call on Groovy Green for a "[Slow Clothing](#)" movement, a la slow food. It made me think about the social and ecological effects of industrialized clothing in a new way. The idea of Slow Clothing brings together labor and globalisation activists, homesteaders, organic fiber and hemp farmers, urban hipsters knitting in coffee shops, and, of course, swappers from Swap-O-Rama-Rama! It raises consumer consciousness while celebrating the homemade.

I picked out two great armloads of clothes because, here's a secret: if you sign up ahead of time to volunteer, you get first dibs sorting through the new stuff as it comes in! But the trade-off is that when you volunteer, you don't have time to do as much do-it-yourself-ing.

I did get a neat bird image silkscreened onto a skirt by Marshall Adams, who had come all the way from Oakland to help out. I sewed a ring of vintage buttons around the hem while chatting with the lovely [Sonya Nimri](#), a designer who has a book on clothing reconstruction coming out this summer. She helped me plan how to attach the skirt, which was too big, to the waistband of a pair of jeans that fit. But then it got busy and I had to help sort more incoming clothes. Next time I will plan to stay all day.

Swap-O-Rama-Ramas have been held in at least 11 cities since 2005, with more planned. The EPA estimates that more than 10 million tons of textile waste go to U.S. landfills each year, so Swaps have kept thousands of pounds of clothing out of landfills, while empowering lots of people to have fun making things. Almost 300 women, men and even some children came to the LA Swap, despite the pouring rain that day.



Wendy Tremayne said in a recent [Treehugger video](#): "My hope is that society can re-engage with the process of creativity and walk away from consumerism."

All the leftover clothing, 20 bags worth, was donated to [Out of the Closet](#). Sundance Channel did a documentary about the LA Swap as part of their new [The Green](#) program, due out in April. Lori is planning another Swaparama for this summer. To stay informed, keep an eye on [the Swap-O-Rama-Rama website](#) and start cleaning out your closet.