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The Deep Ecology Soundtrack: Music as a Vehicle of Awareness

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"Music is a myth in which the actors are tones uttered by the transformative-regenerative power of the One Life - the sacred Tone of Being...." Dane Rudhyar

"Shamans journey between Earth and the individual and collective psyche - in search of the wisdom and the power that can help to make existence meaningful, help make life whole. Journey is the triple magic of sound, rhythm and song." Michael Tucker (from Dreaming With Open Eyes).

The geologic, biologic, meteorologic integrity of the living Earth depends on its motion. The cyclical stability of this planet, the consistent passage of day into cooling night, of Winter's melting into Spring - and even Earth's place in the solar system - is a result of its dance, spinning in place, orbiting the light. The energetic parity between lifeforms - between different constituent elements of the living whole actively consuming one another, bush by deer, deer by wolf, wolf by soil - is a function of their individual danceforms, and the way each dance rhythmically entrains with the next. It is the motive interface between the dancers that determines the form and health of the whole. That motion, expressed in the spinning helix of the DNA molecule and the snake-dance of evolution - is driven by music.

The course the river takes is the liquid actualization of its sonata. A wild parrot is the embodiment of a parrot song, a score written in layerings of muscle and the delicate patterning of bones, and manifested in flight. We are a physical, spiritual, *aural* part of an Earth held together not by any rigid laws of physics, but rather by the fluid principals of music and the constant ministrations of rhythm. Rhythm laid down by the flashing on and off of the neurons sending signals through our brains, in our cycles of activity and rest, in the ebb and flow of tides triggered by a rhythmic moon. Not to mention the microrhythms we call vibrations - atomic, molecular, cellular.

The first sound we ever heard, floating in ecstatic suspension in the liquid universe of our Mother's womb, it was a sound echoing the heartbeat of the sacred Mother Earth, in tangent, in consecration. By opening up to the bodily and spiritual experience of music, we open up to the experience of Nature, as well as the full experiencing of our own rhythmic natures. Like the holophonic echolation of whales, we can use music to help us find each other, our sustenance, and our place - what ethnomusicologist Charlie Kiel termed "deep ecology." Such music mirrors and fuels the biological rhythms, externalizing the patterns beneath the concrete mirage, illuminating the mystery at play. It's no wonder the civilized paradigm has again and again outlawed the music of earthen

spirituality, the Christianized Roman Empire banning the drum as "licentious" and "mischievous", the colonizers of the "New World" passing edicts against the percussive music of their African slaves. The sacred drum did indeed inspire a transition from linear to virtual reality, from manipulable time to the eternal present. It gave "license" to be real, wild, and natural - conditions encroaching civilization could ill afford. It encouraged outlaw bliss, and reunited the participants with the Earth, the source of their power and inspiration for their resistance.

It's easy to forget the inherent organic nature of music, and our ancient and irrevocable contract with its patterns and processes, once detached from that Source. Acculturated and desensitized by a constant deluge of commercial "pop". Those of us grown up in a technological society were exposed to music reduced to consumer pablum, used to sell every manner of inane product, and fed as "Muzak" through tinny speakers in every restaurant and shop. A determining feature of modern musicality is in its distance - relegated to the background rather than filling up the experiential moment with its immediacy. Set against the consumerist imperative, the conscious musician of today finds themselves, accepting of the role or not, in the archetypal position of shaman in the contemporary alternative tribal society - a shaman in search of authenticity, of both ancient and possible form.

For many of us, our first contact with vital and elemental music was the so-called "protest rock", dripping with sensuality, armed with potent lyric images, and driven by rhythm. Rhythm is how we sequence time. Mark the moment with any loud noise, then repeat that noise at measured intervals and you have rhythm. The ear hears what the eye sees in the repeat lines in the design of rock or bark, flowing water or sands at the beach. It is rhythm that sequences life - millions of repeating sonic patterns overlapping and interweaving one another, yet always on beat. Biological health is a function not only of its diversity, but the polyrhythmic interaction of its parts. The diverse expressions of life, and Nature in general, are able to work out their individuality at their own individual tempos, and yet in concert with one another, because they are in sync with the terrestrial, elemental down beat.

Virtually every shamanic tradition features the application of specific mesmerizing rhythms, usually played out on a drum or drums with the help of rattles or shakers, in order to access the hyperaware states that allow for teleportation, premonition, and recognition of the spiritual assignment. Drums produce the "steep-fronted" sonic impulses that most strongly effect the auditory cortex, with an extremely wide range of mostly low frequencies insuring its arousal. In addition, those working in the field of biofeedback have determined that the psychically aroused "alpha/theta border" occurs when the electric brain waves are pulsing at a rate of six to eight cycles per second - the predominate rhythm of Haitian Vodou dances and African trance dancing, as well as the transportive climax of many Native American songs. The coordinated charging and discharging of neuron in the brain synchronize with the impelling rhythms of the drum. In turn, the drummer is led by her or his own entrancement, and the responses of those in attendance. The drummer will become coupled to the movements of the dancers, conscious of every subtle change in composure or muscle tension, easing them like a lover through the progressive states of ecstatic oneness with each other and the Earth - never too fast or too slow. The theta state is that condition after sex or right before sleeping, the "twilight phase" when all the stored images of our life, all the images of the universal conscious, stream before us in patterned profusion. In this way the drummer serves to amplify and focus attention on the coupling between rhythm and realization, self and planet.

It was well over three hundred years ago that a Dutch scientist discovered how clocks placed close together would seem to "lock-on" to each other, synchronizing their beats. It seems to be one of the musical principals the self-regulating planet operates on-that all contiguous, composite elements, (regardless of the drama of their observable interaction),

will tend to "play" together, in consort, in concert, to the ultimate good of the whole. All elements have rhythms, metabolic and behavioral rates of cycling and pulsing. All elements are rhythmists, musicians, focused on staying in beat with one another.

Any time two rhythms are nearly the same, and their source is in shared proximity, they will inevitably entrain. (Huygens, "Law of Entrainment", 1665)

The source for all rhythm is always close at hand, if only beating in our own chests, or felt pounding beneath the pavement at our feet. We have only to step out to fall into step, to immerse ourselves in the opus in progress, *Natura en toto*. Eschewing the dissonance of dominant civilization, we come into tune with everything else. For the other lifeforms the shamanic state is a fact of being, the way they sing their song. For humans it is the inspired state of reunification, the borderless realms of integration into the planetary body of Spirit. A conscious return to rhythm is the return to Nature, to our personal song, to us.

You boys gotta hear my song. If you know my song, you know Charlie.

My cabin lies down a river canyon two miles from the nearest road and the nearest other private land. In fifteen years here I've only recently finished my tiny abode, filled with the gifts of medicine, the ceremonial masks, bones, and artwork both human friends and Nature provide. You can often get a feeling for who somebody is by the make-up of their home. Half of mine is a music room.

A panoply of percussive instruments take up much of the floor, including congas, ashikos from World Drum in Takilma, the Irish Bhodran, a Laughing Crow Arts dun-dun, and mideastern dumbek. One wall is given over to instruments of the breath, from meditative shakuhachis to an incredible plains flute from Watershed Designs, its end carved into the head of a howling wolf. Joseph WhiteDog's gourd shekere sits next to a kalimba, a Hop-Along Cassidy "clicker" from the 1950's, and a Shapeshifter rattle formed into a wolf with stone inlays. Every instrument has a unique personality, a peculiar voice, and a story to go with it. Almost all were gifts or trades. Together, they form opportunities for entrainment, opportunities for magic. For other lifeforms interconnectedness is an unquestioned condition. For us it must be a concerted practice. We may call that practice deep ecology, and the music engendering such connectedness the deep ecology soundtrack.

Just what constitutes the music of deep, spiritual ecology - music for Mother Earth? It is determined not by its intent, but by its effect. It is that music which invokes and encourages direct, sentient interaction with the processes of the wild world, rather than acting as a substitute for that experience. No matter how peaceful or mellow, it must stimulate rather than sedate, challenge rather than appease.

One indication is the lyric content, in those rare cases where (generally underexposed) environmental artists truly tell their story from a biocentric, life-centered perspective. While there is a fair amount of "conscious" music being recorded and performed, most is written with a focus on social justice issues and personal therapy. Music reflecting, exploring and celebrating the interconnectedness we call deep ecological consciousness, gives voice not only to the human soul, but to an entire living planet. Those looking for the lyrics of this deep world can find them in the work of Cecelia Ostrow, Casey Neill, Dana Lyons, Alice Dimiciele, Joanne Rand, and the more humorous Scotty Johnson, Darryl Cherney and The Swamp Poets. The potent poet John Trudell best exemplifies Native American music consonant with deep ecological priorities. A particularly teleportive release is "Gula Gula" from Sami' (Lappe) tribal songstress Mari Boine.

It's only when we leave the clear arena of lyrics and enter the suggestive realms of

instrumentals that the determination gets difficult. Is it enough that the work is titled with a reference to Nature, or uses overdubs of recorded Nature sounds along with the instrumentation? Given that music is a natural human evocation, evolved around a shared tribal fire, even a microphone between "performer" and "audience" can gut the experience of its intimacy and primalcy. At the same time recorded music astronomically increases its potential audience, it reduces the depth of experience. The act of recording even the most primary and acoustic music furthers the separation, storing the once lived moment in patently dead vaults of plastic tape. And what about the use of synthesizers, where pretence is an art?

Today, playing the flute, congas, piano, saxophone, become an ecological protest. Sound emerges from within the musical instruments, directly from their source. And you hold this source in your hands, in your lap, in your arms, around your neck. Vibrations warm you. The sound touches you. It is not coming at you from a different, distant and mechanical point. Synthesizers do not emit music. They are faulty. They do not vibrate. The sound takes a digital walk first and then jumps into the loudspeakers. This is the only way they come to linger in the air wearing their spacesuits. These sounds are ignorant of the earthly environment. They do not possess the elementary quality of surviving in Nature. (Sakis Papadimitriou, Greek pianist.)

There are those recordings in my extensive collection, original music inspired by real-life experiences in the natural world, and performed on real instruments, that call me out of my mind and into the quality sensorium. There can be no question when the intent listener finds herself falling into cyclic time, geologic time, liquid and mineral presence. When the listener becomes non-verbal as well, the mind quieted by the sounds flowing through its forest. When the movement of the notes somehow suggests a hawk or loon and the listener becomes that loon - feeling the water beneath it, the tickle of water grasses on its webbed feet, the wind in its iridescent feathers....

The most effective of these for me have been the percussive albums of Gabriel Roth, Obo Addy and Mickey Hart, Paul Winter's "Common Ground" album, releases by Ancient Future, Carlos Nakai and Merle Saunders. When it comes to instrumental attempts, they are most impactful the deeper, more descriptive, more immediate and present they are, and the degree to which they engage you, couple you, move you - refusing to be relegated to the background. They begin as aural tapestries establishing a primal landscape, then evolve at their best into agents of reconnection, as tools of the shaman.

It is this sense of music as a shamanic, deep ecological tool that fascinates me. It is music that insists on not only being listened to, but played. It has the capacity, like the beat of the heart, the roar of the drum or the crashing of the river - to deepen our felt connection, empower our individual dance, and incite our response.... A vehicle of awakesness. A gift of the Earth.

Postscript:

Good sources for the above include the Ladyslipper catalogue of women's music, and Dave Foreman's Books of the Big Outside. The work of Joanne Rand, Darryl Cherney, Alice DiMichele, Casey Neill, Cecelia Ostrow. Dana Lyons, Scotty Johnson and myself are available through the Earth First! Journal, POB 5871, Missoula, MT, 59806. The best music, of course, is live and participatory. For information on booking performances of any of the above, write the author: Lone Wolf Circles, POB 652, Reserve, NM, 87830.

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