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Paul Winter improvises wildlife melodies with his saxophone

A few years ago Paul Winter blew into his saxophone to trigger off the wolves in a lazy forest of Northern Minnesota. In answer, four wolves cried out and gave four of the "bluest howls of any jazz musician," Winter says.

Gradually, through listening to many creatures he began to realize that "the whole world is made up of music makers besides humans," he says. "I wanted to explore them and bring the beauty of their spirit and sound to the people."

Winter probably could have made it as a straight jazz musician, but the earth called him and he felt obliged to answer. He has conversed with coyotes, whales and just recently spotted owls, which symbolize old growth forests.

These wildlife are the focus of his new album "Cathedral Forest." He has assimilated them so closely with his saxophone that these special creatures have probably come to think of him as a mate.

Winter and his "Friends" create, or improvise, the sounds they feel in nature. The versatile saxophone player was formerly with the now defunct improvisational jazz band Oregon, and now plays with the Paul Winter Consort.

Most recently, the Paul Winter Consort was called by the Cathedral Forest Action Group to play at the Third Annual Memorial Gathering in the Middle Santiam, a major section of the Cathedral Forest.

Playing for the forest was a first for Winter. After seeing the devastation of the dead, black forests in Europe, he came back to the states wanting to prevent this from ever happening here. Gary Snyder, an environmentalist poet and friend, suggested he do a benefit for the Cathedral Forest.

Although Winter's home state of Connecticut contains a wide diversity of deciduous trees, there are no old growth, he says. He was "profoundly shocked" to witness the clear cuts and slash burns in the forest.

"It looks like war," he says. "It looks like devastation after war."

But it is important to realize that everyone uses wood, but that we must be appropriate in using the wood, he adds.

He believes the world is still stuck in an infantile, futile situation where the personal greed of a few overpowers the real needs of the forest, the critters that live there.

"That's us," he says. "Greed has got to be seen as a disease," he adds, "a disease like a drug

I think we are very lucky to live in these times when these emissaries, these teachers of the wilderness are coming to us. Maybe they're being sent, who knows, by whoever is directing this game, to re-awaken us to our own nature and therefore our own consciousness to a greater nature at a very crucial time when we have just about destroyed our planet.
— Paul Winter



addict addicted to power. Winter says that, in a sense, profit motives are an American religion.

"It could be that the ecology of the forest is more important than the needs of the building industry or the profits of the timber companies," he says. "The nourishment from the wilderness will be as important as the need to preserve the ecology of this place."

He says the nourishment one gains from being in the forest is like "taking a vitamin 'W' for

wilderness." Winter's environmentalist days instinctually began when he was a boy growing up in Connecticut. When he went to the wilderness in his twenties "it was like a rediscovery of what I had loved as a little kid that at the time you don't think about at all. You love animals as all children, you love being outside and going to camp."

His first collaboration with music was in 1969 when he met a captive wolf brought to his hometown that "totally turned me on to wolves," he says. When he stared into the animal's eyes, "he got me"

"I've never forgotten since," he adds. "It was like the feeling of being with a very wise creature. It is the feeling people have when they see their idol or their hero or some great teacher. It is the feeling of reverence that you are honored to be that close to that creature."

He believes it is a great gift that these wise creatures are being brought into people's consciousness at this time.

"I think we are very lucky to live in these times when these emissaries, these teachers of the wilderness are coming to us," he says.

"Maybe they're being sent, who knows, by whoever is directing this game, to re-awaken us to our own nature and therefore our consciousness to a greater nature at a very crucial time when we have just about destroyed our planet."

He believes that the only way we can survive on the planet is to reconnect with nature.

"We can't do it by any new philosophy, new technology or new theology," he says. We must listen and learn from these elders and give voice together everyday," he adds.

As one of his songs based on a West African village song says "Our voices will blend when we touch common ground."

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CFAG works to preserve the wilderness

Mary Beth Nearing was more than pleased with the gathering she and the Cathedral Forest Action Group put together for May 24-26. They were successful in getting more than 800 people to drive many miles from home through 17 miles of dirt road to see the Cathedral Forest in its extreme contrast: Douglas firs more than 300 hundred years old bordered by patches of severed and wasted clear cut. They earned \$5,500 through donations, netting \$1,500 after costs. The success shows that awareness of the old growth issue is "picking up steam," Nearing says. CFAG first formed in the spring of 1984 to educate the public about old growth in national forests, specifically the Cathedral Forest which stretches from the Northern Redwoods in California to Alaska; one of the last remaining old growth forest in the world. CFAG has had direct confrontations with the companies that log there through direct action and civil disobedience. The direct action has led to arrests and court cases, some of which have been successfully overturned, Nearing says. The group has grown from a dozen to more than 50 active and 500 supportive members. The court cases and media attention have helped to educate people on the old growth issue, which is one of the main goals of CFAG. Nearing says. Some of CFAG's specific goals are: to employ a second growth economy, to preserve old growth for the health and value of humans and to allow the "critters that depend upon the trees" to exist. Nearing says. Recently, CFAG has been focusing on educating the public through presentations in the school system. The money earned from the gathering will go toward the presentations and impending court debts, Nearing says.

Story by Shannon Kelley

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