

Review: Flute player invokes 'guardian angels'

Long Beach gardener and philosopher Larkin Stentz unveils his 12th CD

By **PATRICK WEBB**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Listeners can hear the flute player's breathing on "Sanctuary."

That may not be common, but it is intended, according to Larkin Stentz, who says it is his way of seeking to create a more human connection.

The unorthodox Long Beach musician, equally known for his landscaping work and environmentalism, is unveiling his 12th CD this week.

Stentz will attend a kick-off party 7 p.m. Friday, May 24, at the Peninsula Arts Center, 504 Pacific Ave. N., Long Beach, Wash.

The following day, from 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, May 25, he will be at the Abbracci Coffee Bar, 408 Pacific Ave., Long Beach, Wash., signing copies. The CD is available for purchase at Abbracci, Astoria's McVarish Gallery, where some recordings took place, and the Three Cups Coffee House.

Most artists, insistent on their singularity, refuse to be labeled or placed in a box. But a music store owner inevitably would shelve it among New Age.

Stentz' 12th album is a personal journey to find an "inner place."

"It is that feeling place where our guardian angels meet us and reassure us every-thing is OK," he says in liner notes.

Prior incarnations

Stentz repertoire features 11 albums. "To the Essence of a Candle," was released in 1978 in early days of New Age. "O'cean," released in 1980, featured an attempt to synchronize the movements of a dancer with the flute, combined with sounds of the ocean and recordings of humpback whales. "Stairway to Emptiness" was designed to reflect a period of meditation after yoga. A collaborative work, "Earthlight," was described as "mystical meditations."

Another, "Blossom in the Storm," was recorded in a 300-year-old cloister in Holland, including one track in tribute to



Photo by Patrick Webb

Does the interior structure of the geodesic dome greenhouse on Larkin Stentz' small farm in Long Beach, Wash., appear to point the listener in a clear direction? Stentz, an environmentalist and garden expert, plays the bamboo flute and other instruments on his new CD, "Sanctuary," which is being released this week.

Russian anti-nuclear campaigner Andrei Sakharov. In 2014, he recorded a CD to raise money for the Astoria Column, playing on its winding staircase.

Disquieting

The new album is adorned with striking cover artwork called "Hold You Within," a painting by Seattle artist Sh'Kala Warren from her Soul Series.

It begins with "Opening the Door," two beats, repeated for a full 90 seconds before his bamboo flute begins playing. On first hearing, it is not immediately apparent that it is a drum, thus somewhat disquieting. Then the musician's breath is heard, way, way before the first musical note.

"Raindrops on Golden Strings" follows, a similar tapping rhythm to begin until the recorded sound of the ocean sweeps in, an equal partner to the musical notes. His sound engineer has mixed the components to make them akin to a call-and-response, sometimes with the ocean dominant over the human-created sound. It allows nature to display its rhythmic power, relentless,

perhaps superior. The track introduces Stentz' evident skill playing the hammered dulcimer which will feature later.

Stentz describes this 12-minute track as an homage to Phillip Glass, a minimalist composer not known for catchy toe-tapping tunes. On second listening, his work has a soothing, reassuring quality.

The dulcimer returns in "Infinite Heart," whose initial high notes conjure images of characters walking into a haunted house. The segue into a more safe and satisfying sound leads to a focus on a single note to concentrate the ear in a soothing manner.

Sweet sound

Bamboo and silver flute offerings, with some understated synthesizer work (in combination with Michael Stearns on "Two Souls Dance") fill the rest of the album, plus a penny whistle and a simple South American wind instrument called a kayna, whose sound is as uplifting as birdsong. There is a raw, deceptively simple quality to it all. One flute piece, "Sweet Bamboo," is improvised but not directionless.

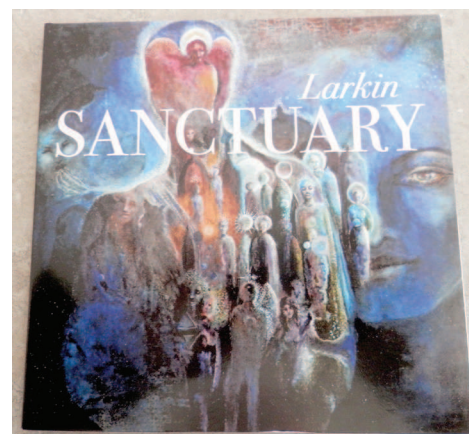


Photo by Patrick Webb

"Sanctuary" features 10 pieces by Larkin Stentz plus a version of "Amazing Grace." The cover artwork is "Hold You Within," a painting by Seattle artist Sh'Kala Warren from her Soul Series.

CD LAUNCH PARTY

7 p.m. Friday, May 24

Peninsula Arts Center, 504 Pacific Ave. N., Long Beach, Wash.

SIGNING AND SALES

9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, May 25,

Abbracci Coffee Bar, 408 Pacific Ave., Long Beach, Wash.

The album is available at two Oregon locations, Three Cups Coffee House, 279 W. Marine Drive, Astoria, and the McVarish Gallery, 160 10th St., Astoria.

\$15

For the finale, Stentz offers "Amazing Grace." Commonly heard in mournful bagpipe or female gospel vocal styles, the classic takes a softer, gentler direction with his Indian bamboo flute. How sweet the sound is when played so simply.

Like many whose journey for meaning has zigged and zagged to discover balance, Stentz offers occasional explanations inaccessible to the uninitiated. One track which demonstrates his comfortable skill on the silver flute, with an especially powerful conclusion, is "Al-one." The title, one is told, is a play on the yin and yang of "all one" and "alone."

Stentz' deliberate incongruity is clear evidence that one size does not fit all. **AW**