Love Your Mother

This piece was scheduled to run on Earth Day at the Salvation South website. Unfortunately, publication there is suspended for the time being due to an injury suffered by founder/editor Chuck Reese. We hope to resume publication there very soon.
In the meantime, this Earth Day piece was in danger of aging out, so I wanted to
share in hopes that y'all will check out these worthy recordings.
Thanks for your support here and at Salvation South. – rr-k

Every year on April 22, millions of people around the world (some claim more than a billion) pay tribute to our Big Blue Marble by celebrating Earth Day. 2022 marks 52 years of this tradition in the United States and 32 years internationally. Earth Day is ostensibly about "saving the planet," though it might be more accurate to say it is about ensuring that the planet remains a viable place for human existence; the planet has survived more than a few extinction level events and endured just fine. As for us? The jury is out.

To be brutally honest, Earth Day has long since been co-opted as a marketing gambit by many of the more egregious violators of the planet's overall health.

EARTH DAY! BROUGHT TO YOU BY GE! WE BRING GOOD THINGS TO LIFE!

BUY A SUBARU AND WE WILL PLANT A TREE!

NEW FOR EARTH DAY! ECO-FRIENDLY BABY SEAL SKINS! 100% ORGANIC!

The Flattening never sleeps.

In the meantime, as we struggle to mitigate the cycle of consumption/pollution – and reconcile the brutal contradictions and deceptions inherent in the corporatization of this once 'innocent' observance – here are three new albums spurred by the artists' concern for our fate.

I won't pretend that recording, or listening to, a set of music driven by this noble impulse accomplishes much in pushing back against environmental disaster, any more than corporate appeals to "save the planet" by buying more crap with a spiffy eco-label does. On the other hand, all an artist can do is what an artist does: Induce us to pay attention to something that means enough to spur them to create. We share our divine spark as best we can. In this case, we are asked to consider our place in the ecosphere while we listen to truly wonderful music.

So give these recent releases a listen. Then get out there and pick up some litter or plant a tree. Doing something is more useful than just throwing up our hands, no matter how tempting that path might be.

***Hurricane Clarice* – Allison de Groot and Tatiana Hargreaves, Free Dirt Records**

For Allison de Groot (banjo) and Tatiana Hargreaves (fiddle), the follow-up to their eponymous debut album on Free Dirt Records confirms their reputation as two of the hottest talents in the stringband/bluegrass realm. Their archival exploration runs deep, their chops are kind of dizzying, and their charming harmonies bring to mind the best of the Carter

Family.

On *Hurricane Clarice*, De Groot and Hargreaves created what they call “an ode to family as a source of hope in a time of dying.” Recorded in Portland, Oregon, during the savage heat wave of summer 2021 – temps ran 40-50* above normal for nearly a month, with an estimated 1400 deaths – they dug into the dusty archives, penned a tune apiece, and interspersed recordings of their grandmothers to outline a vision of kin, community, and respect for our shared histories that might be all that stands between us and oblivion.

This album is getting a ton or repeat play here at i2bHQ. Don’t sleep on this one.

***Only The Killer Would Know* – Valorie Miller, Blackbird Record Label / Indie AM Gold**

Asheville-based singer-songwriter Miller’s latest is a nightmare tale of paradise gone bad. Years back, she moved onto a beautiful property near Swannanoa, North Carolina. Perfect, right?

“The very first night that I stayed alone in the trailer, on that little acre, I had a dream that the earth was a very thin layer of dirt on top of a giant trash pile and that the trash was sentient. It knew I was there, and it was evil. The next day, I woke up and I was like, ‘Something is weird about this place. Something is bad.’”

It was bad, alright. Turns out her little slice of heaven had been a dumping site for the weaponry and explosives company Chemtronics. Years earlier the corporation “restored the land” and moved on. It took years before Miller discovered that her

ongoing health issues were caused by living atop detritus from our military-industrial complex. On *Only the Killer Would Know*, Miller tells a tale of paradise ~~lost~~ squandered through tunes like “Apocalachia,” “Your Own Well,” and “Home of the Brave,” where she sings:

“Here in the mountains so green, it’s deceiving
You’d almost believe it’s a Garden of Eden
Somebody sold you thoughts that you’re thinking
And left a trace in the water you’re drinking.”

Yet for someone so clearly and deservedly pissed off, the album is raw and heartfelt and achingly lovely; this is no banshee rant. Imagine Lucinda if she’d come from the hollers instead of being born by the bayou and you get an idea of Miller’s sound. A damn fine listen and completely infuriating.

***FIVE MINUTES for Earth* – Yolanda Kondonassis, Azica Records**

Oklahoman* Yolanda Kondonassis is one of the world’s most celebrated harp players. (No, not the harmonica; that big stringed thingy that angels play.) With *FIVE MINUTES for Earth*, Kondonassis delivers perhaps the most beautiful set of music I’ve heard this year.

Kondonassis writes that she experiences “the harp [as] a strong metaphorical protagonist in the story of Earth: majestic but fragile, feminine yet fiercely powerful, and strikingly diverse.” She challenged fifteen contemporary composers to write new works of around five minutes each inspired by the planet’s atmospheric or environmental condition.

The resulting 75 minutes of music ranges from dreamy and gentle (“Kohola Sings,” Takuma Ito’s ode to the humpback whale); to mildly disconcerting (“inconvenient wounds,” Reena Esmail’s imagining of the moment a glacier cracks open); to the ominous and mind-bending (Stephen Hartke’s “Fault Line”). Even at its most tragic moments, the harp is inherently beautiful, and the mood from start to finish is *Shimmer*.

FIVE MINUTES is a project under the umbrella of Kondonassis’s non-profit Earth at Heart initiative. All proceeds from this album and any future performance of the compositions will go toward funding environmental action.

* According to the United States Census Bureau, Oklahoma is a Southern State. There are also some huge historical reasons for considering it part of the South. More on that another day.