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Ten Years After

A decade into her remarkable career, Norah Jones moves in a stylish new direction

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Deep Sea Music

Growing up in Michigan, marine-life painter and conservationist Wyland developed a passion for blues, soul and R&B.

Last year, the one-named artist had the chance to realize a dream when he convened a crew of blues and jazz stars to record tracks for his three-volume *Blues Planet* series.

During five days at New Orleans' Piety Studios, marquee artists Taj Mahal, Rod and Honey Piazza, Mitch Woods, Jon



Cleary, Steve Turre, Delfeayo Marsalis and Dr. Michael White brought Wyland's words and music to life. A-list session players — including guitarists Rusty Zinn and Henry Carvajal, saxophonist Joe Sublett and drummer Willie Panker — also contributed to the project, proceeds of

which go to the Wyland Foundation's conservation efforts.

"It's probably the most fun I've had with my clothes on," Wyland says from his West Coast home in Laguna Beach, California. "It was like making a giant mural. I could hear certain voices, so I would call different people into the studio. We'd huddle, and I'm like the quarterback. Then we'd just turn these guys loose."

The spirited performances on *Blues Planet* speak for themselves. Released in April to commemorate the second anniversary of the BP oil disaster, the second volume, like the first, alternates Chicago and Mississippi blues, New Orleans jazz and R&B and Caribbean grooves. Lyrics reflect Wyland's anger and sadness over the devastation visited upon the eco-systems of New Orleans and the Gulf states, which he witnessed days after the 2010 Deep Water Horizon explosion. "It was oil as far as you could see," he recounts. "We had to put on gas masks. I mean, it was saturating our skin. It was horrible."

Wyland's sentiments are echoed by the performances on *Blues Planet*, none more so than Taj Mahal's. The blues vet was staying at Wyland's home in the Florida Keys when he came across pages of his friend's music and lyrics. When, he wanted to know, are we going to record this? Thus encouraged, Wyland started assembling his crew, including longtime friends the Piazzas, Hawaiian blues guitarist and singer Willie K, reggae-roots singer Nick-I and New Orleans clarinet king Dr. Michael White.

Certainly, recording this music in the city gut-punched by Hurricane Katrina and kicked again by the oil spill resonated with *Blues Planet* participants. "We had to [record] in New Orleans," Wyland says. "There was no place else that we could have made this music as important and powerful as it was."

A documentary of the recording sessions premiered at the Newport Beach Film Festival in April. For more information, go to www.Wyland.com. —Bob Weinberg