

Liner notes

Oceanographer, artist, conservationist and educator Wyland has dedicated this ambitious three-volume project (each volume to be released every six months starting in October 2011 with a collectable vinyl boxed set being made available by late 2012) to an inspiring and significant foursome: the great sea explorer and researcher Jacques Cousteau, one of Wyland's primary idols and role models whose much celebrated Centennial was last year; National Geographic marine biologist and scientist Dr. Sylvia Earle whose work Wyland greatly admires and whose quote "The ocean is our heart" resonates deeply in Wyland's travels; the late legendary bluesman Robert Johnson, one of Wyland's great blues inspirations whose centennial occurred serendipitously during these recording sessions; the big man Clarence Clemons, and blues great Taj Mahal, a longtime friend of Wyland's who also plays a central role to much of the music and underlying message heard herein.

Wyland once told me, "We need a sea of change. And music is a big part of it." By placing music side by side with his concerns for the world's ocean, lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands, Wyland stresses the power of the arts to communicate a message of conservation to countless people worldwide, particularly the younger generation. For Wyland's second such eco-conscious music project (almost five years ago, his Earth Jazz Agents' *Rhythms of the Sea* was released on Wyland Records), he has decided to again put many of his marine teachings, concerns and ocean-related themes into what has resulted in a bounty of indelible, moving and revealing lyrics – or poems as he prefers to call the resulting songs. The newly formed (and soon to be touring hopefully in a city near you!) Wyland Blues Planet Band features an array of musicians performing a genre-busting mix of blues-related music incorporating rock, jazz, reggae and New Orleans. All the right ingredients came to play, Wyland and company helping to cook up what will surely be considered a classic for listeners and environmentally concerned world citizens to enjoy and learn from for generations to come. Gary Firstenberg, Wyland's longtime official photographer, aptly reminded me during the sessions, which appropriately took place in New Orleans (the home to jambalaya not to mention the U.S. birthplace for much of this country's great music from jazz to blues), "Food is very important to this city and every musician was an important ingredient to these sessions. It's a smorgasbord of sound!"

From Taj Mahal and Hawaiian music legend Willie K (ukelele/guitar) to the spontaneously named "Planette" vocalists (Andromeda Turre, Amy Hānaiali'i Gilliom and Nancy Gros) and instrumentalists and soloists ranging from Steve Turre (trombone and conch shells) to Rod Piazza (harmonica), Mitch Woods (piano and organ) and Jon Cleary (piano) - the resulting 48 tracks (16 tunes conveniently for each volume) are all undoubtedly "blues masterpieces" – hardly an overstatement, which is exactly what Wyland unhesitatingly declared when the sessions culminated. All told, almost 40 musicians participated over the

course of a mere and miraculous five days, most to all tracks done with little prior rehearsal other than the minutes leading up to the tape rolling live in studio. "Every single day, every moment was magical," Wyland said as he listened back to some of the tracks while musicians packed their things up at session's end. "The key word was 'balance' - of personalities, of songs, of style, of grooves. There was a lot of creativity from the moment we walked into that studio. And it was powerful to see it each and every day." The result – a tapestry, and everybody united in this tapestry of music for the planet.

That Wyland wanted specifically to do this project in New Orleans made perfect sense. The southern U.S. port city rich in history and music tradition has somehow persevered through some very tough times, noticeably still rehabilitating from the tragic after affects of 2005's Hurricane Katrina and more recently with the BP Oil Spill of April 2010. Recorded at the famed Piety Street Recording studios, a bevy of local musicians were utilized, too, adding an extra element of validity to this project's significance it was conceived in its formative stages as a response to Katrina and the tragic Gulf spill. Amongst New Orleans' own who heeded the call - Roger Lewis (Dirty Dozen Brass Band baritone saxophonist), Delfeayo Marsalis (trombone) and Dr. Michael White (clarinet) who is but one of many that lost just about everything from the catastrophic levee failures of Katrina. "There's a certain time to do this," said Wyland, "and to bring it to New Orleans, it means everything. This city is so alive with music, art and inspiration. And we can never allow these types of catastrophic things to happen again. Not on our watch." Wyland wants to be sure that our water is as safe and pure as the music, because ultimately it belongs to everyone and that should be for many, many more generations to come.

After Dr. Sylvia Earle gave Wyland a close-up look at the disastrous effects the oil spill had and would have in the future, she told him that the ocean policies we put in place over the next 10 years would determine the future of our oceans for the next 10,000. Wyland was understandably feeling a bit glum, perhaps even pessimistic, with such a statistic. But the blues can be as down home dirty and depressing - no matter how truthful (perhaps more so because of it) - to outright uplifting. And Wyland credits Gary Firstenberg's passion for the blues as helping to ignite this project, making it the right music for the right time. So Wyland – a leader in today's Green Movement – turned to green's neighboring cousin in the rainbow to make his point: the Blues. And as with the countless light to deep blues found in the Pacific Ocean alone, the resulting recording sessions are ample proof of the color blue's range in music, too, from one end of the spectrum to the next. "I'm inspired by all the blues I've heard," says Wyland, originally from a blues hub himself in Detroit. He might also add, "and seen", in a nod to his vast global water explorations ranging expeditions to the Antarctic to a recent journey with a team of educators down the length of the Mississippi River, from its headwaters at Lake Itasca to the bustle of the Mississippi Delta.

In addition to Wyland and Taj Mahal's love of water (Taj has a well-known fondness for the ocean and fishing), the two obviously share their love for the blues, too. That Taj plays an essential and vital role on all three volumes comes as no surprise. They first became friends in 1978 when Wyland painted the guitarist/vocalist with images of Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison in a mural on the side of The Golden Bear along the California coast. It was because of their relationship Taj offered his support for the cause before even discussing the music. Without hesitation, the bluesman told me, "It's really important that someone with Wyland's visibility and musicians of our caliber get together and say what's on our mind (because) the large majority of people don't know quite what the heck is going on on this planet." He encouragingly continued, "This is just the beginning regarding my involvement."

So, here we have a perfect example of people - musicians and artists in particular - getting together and making known what they feel on the inside. "To put something together with Wyland, who is doing fabulous work with inspired musicians is a very unique experience", said Taj. *Taj couldn't have said it better.* Wyland, the Executive Producer and ultimate glue behind these sessions wanted to make sure to add that this is ultimately to connect the environment to the kids, the next generation responsible for taking care of and being concerned for Mother Earth's well-being, particularly its ocean life and vast arteries of freshwater. And it cannot be overemphasized that it will soon be the younger generation's role and ultimately their responsibility to preserve this planet. It is our generation's responsibility to furnish them with the knowledge, respect, and will to make those changes. "This is why the Wyland Foundation is the main beneficiary to the music we created," says Wyland. "The planet is in deep trouble, but we can use music in the form of education for the souls of future generations. Let's take care of our planet, so it can take care of us."

Enjoy and respect the music as you would the planet we all share. And if the Earth can be as timeless, appreciated and inspiring as is this music and the thought and energy that's been put into it – mission accomplished! Listen to Mother Earth's blues and let's do something about it... Wyland and company sure are.

Laurence Donohue-Greene, August 2011
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nycjazzrecord.com

Wyland Blues Planet Band:

[Taj Mahal](#) - Vocals, Guitar, Banjo
[Nick-I Hernandez](#) - Vocals, Guitar, Percussion
[Rod Piazza](#) - Harmonica, Vocals, Percussion
[Miss Honey](#) - Piano, Percussion
[Henry Carvajal](#) - Guitar
[Rusty Zinn](#) - Guitar, Vocals
[Dave Kida](#) - Drums, Percussion
[Jonny Viau](#) - Saxophone, Percussion, Washboard
[Hank Van Sickle](#) - Bass, Percussion
[Willie K](#) - Vocal, Guitar, Ukelele
[Steve Turre](#) - Trombone, Conch Shells
[Mitch Woods](#) - Piano, Organ
[Amy Hānaiali'i Gilliom](#) - Vocals
[Andromeda Turre](#) - Vocals
[Mick Weaver](#) - Organ
[Joe Sublett](#) - Saxophone
[Darrell Leonard](#) - Trumpet, Bass Trumpet
[Tony Braunagel](#) - Drums, Percussion
[Jon Cleary](#) - Piano
[Johnny Lee Schell](#) - Guitar
[Larry Fulcher](#) - Bass
[Dr. Michael White](#) - Clarinet
[Delfeayo Marsalis](#) - Trombone
[Kirk M. Joseph, Sr.](#) - Tuba, Sousaphone
[Gino Beltran](#) - Bass, Percussion
[Willie Panker](#) - Drums, Percussion
[Arlee Leonard](#) - Vocals
[Roselyn Lionhart](#) - Vocals
[Benny Jones](#) - Bass Drum
[Kerry Hunter](#) - Snare Drum
[Romy Kaye](#) - Vocals, Percussion
[Nancy Gros](#) - Vocals, Percussion
[Roger Lewis](#) - Baritone Saxophone
[Jeremy Thomas](#) - Trumpet
[Mario Abney](#) - Trumpet
[Jesse Stoltzfus](#) - Violin
[Amzie Adams](#) - Weissenbourn Slide Guitar, Dulcimer