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SONGS TO THE EARTH

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SINGER ANNETTE CANTOR BLENDS GREGORIAN CHANTS, WOOD FLUTE AND CELLO

Annette Cantor takes two age-old music traditions from Europe (Gregorian chants and cello performance) and mixes them with ancient Native American musical customs (wooden flute and indigenous percussion) forming a unique sound on her recording *Songs To The Earth*, an album dedicated to our planet and the divine sacredness of nature.

"This music was created specifically for meditation and healing of all that hurts inside -- physically, mentally and emotionally," Cantor says. "This album was recorded at the gateway of my own journey into a year of deep healing from cancer, and the music accompanied me throughout the process. On my daily walks into nature, I received profound inspiration and renewal, and I realized how much I love this world and appreciate the sacredness of our existence."

Originally trained as an opera singer in Vienna, Cantor has developed a unique style of soulful emotive expression with her singing strengthened by technical expertise and classical studies. Her musical background includes having performed on-stage and recorded with new age music pioneer C.G. Deuter. On *Songs To The Earth* she is accompanied by top musicians from Santa Fe, New Mexico: Native American flutist Patrick Shendo-Mirabal (who has performed with his brother Robert Mirabal, Kenny Aranoff, Larry Mitchell), cellist Michael Kott (Sons of Ganesh, Robert Mirabal, Moontribe), percussionist Mark Clark (Cat Stevens, Ottmar Liebert, John Popper), percussionist Mike Chavez (Ottmar Liebert, The Jon Gagan Trio, Jono Manson), and percussionist Gregory Gutin (Sita, Jeremy Bleich).

Annette Cantor's music can be purchased either as a CD or as digital downloads at online sales sites such as CDbaby, Amazon, iTunes, eMusic, Rhapsody and many others. For more information about Cantor, visit her website at www.annettesings.com.

"I was born and raised in Germany where Gregorian chants represent some of the oldest music in the European culture," explains Cantor. "Now I live in the Southwestern United States where a thousand years ago flutes and drums were being used. Blending these ancient musical traditions seemed a natural way to bless the earth as a whole."

Songs To The Earth is not the first time Cantor has brought together venerable, historical musical elements from various cultures. She first explored the idea on the album *Sacred Fusion* with vocalist Shanti Shivani, who sang East Indian Dhrupad (one of the oldest Hindustani vocal genres) while Cantor sang Gregorian chants with a droning tambura and other instruments from India accompanying them. Cantor says, "I realized Dhrupa and Gregorian chants have similar tonal qualities so I thought they would go together well." Cantor also collaborated with C. G. Deuter (another German relocated to Santa Fe) on *Adore Te* (improvisations on Gregorian chants with classic new age music performed by Deuter) and *Die Blaue Blume* (a collection of German folk songs with accompaniment by Deuter and other musicians). In addition, Cantor has sung and played violin with Deuter in concert and on several of his recordings including *Garden of the Gods*, *Earth Blue* and *Mystery of Light*.

Cantor was raised a Catholic in Germany and heard Gregorian chants in church when she was growing up. In high school she studied Latin which enabled her to interpret the words being sung. She was

particularly drawn to the chants of the Gregorian tradition which historically have been open to improvisation by individual singers. The most famous female composer of Gregorian chants was Hildegard von Bingen, the 12th Century German religious leader, early human rights activist and visionary. Cantor, who sings von Bingen material daily, has included Hildegard chants on most of her recordings including Songs To The Earth. However, Cantor also often utilizes wordless vocalizing to help capture the mood and feelings she is presenting.

“The words that Hildegard von Bingen wrote are sometimes prayers, but other ones are like love poems or ecstatic expressions of admiration and adoration of God, Christ, Mother Mary, the church and nature. Hildegard will compare Mother Mary to the flowers or the dew that fell on the grass in the morning as an inspiration to divinity. Hildegard also used a lot of nature images and colors, and evoked all the senses -- hearing, seeing, touching and even tasting and smelling. She might say, ‘When Mary came into the world, she inspired all the spices’ or that ‘the flowers bloomed,’ so that you can almost smell a scent in the music.”

To create Songs To The Earth, all of the musicians recorded together live in the studio. Annette created the basic song structure, within which most of the sections were improvised. “We really had to listen to each other carefully,” Annette says, “but we had a rapport from playing concerts together.” A small amount of vocals, cello and percussion were later overdubbed to round out the sound.

According to Cantor, “Songs To The Earth is my specific contribution to this temple we live in, this planet, this world. ‘Gaia Dreaming’ is a song to the Earth Mother, who, in Native American legends, dreamed the world into being. The next piece, ‘Water Blessing,’ is a prayer for this essential element of life, and the music just flows, very water-like, set to no clear beat. ‘To The Great Mother of Compassion’ is a universal prayer asking for help in dealing with our suffering. ‘Ave Generosa’ is a Hildegard chant poetically praising the principal of the divine feminine. The tune is one of two that features the Middle Eastern doumbek drum giving the piece a more international flavor. ‘Healing Prayer’ has a very trance-like feeling with lots of wordless vocals. ‘Forest Meditation’ is all wordless vocal improvisation with a very rhythmic cello. This piece honors the act of going out into nature and communing with the trees and the wind. ‘In Gratitude’ is another chant by Hildegard and begins with the droning ancient Australian didgeridoo. No matter what our circumstances, there is always something in our lives to be grateful for. Expressing gratitude to the earth has almost become a spiritual practice for me.”

Growing up in Germany, Annette studied singing and violin performance, and was involved in school choirs and orchestras. Her early musical influences ranged from classical (Bach) to jazz (Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson). Cantor studied voice at the Vienna Academie of Music and earned a degree in voice teaching. She became involved with the healing arts movement, initially utilizing dance and movement, and after moving to New York City she also incorporated singing into her healing practices. In New York she studied the Alexander Technique, an energy healing practice with the patient developing awareness of physical alignment as they move. She underwent the intense three-year training program and became a certified teacher of the Alexander Technique.

To get closer to nature, Annette moved to Santa Fe, drawn by the spiritual community she found there “and the good scent of the air.” She began pursuing vocal improvisations, both in healing situations and as a spiritual performer. She sang in front of the Dalai Lama at the World Sacred Music Festival in Los Angeles, at the Resonant Wave Festival in Berlin and at a concert celebrating World Water Day in Santa Fe. Her deep love of poetry has been expressed in performances with distinguished poets Donna Thomson, Jane Hirshfield, Drew Dellinger, Roger Housden and Rumi poetry presenter Coleman Barks. Cantor often sings the poems after they have been recited. She also gives voice lessons and workshops which combine her healing practice with patients breathing and singing for therapeutic effect.

Cantor states, “For me it is a dream come true to be able to sing and let my voice be a true instrument, no longer kept in the mental realm of words, but free to express, through pure sound, the yearning, beauty, love and blissfulness of my inner experience. It is my hope that this music will help the listener make the connection with their heart, with nature, with the divine and with whatever is really important to them as an individual.”