

Beyond the Divide | Synopsis

Native American and Indigenous Performers Join with International Musicians

Production Offers Perspectives on Protecting the Earth for Future Generations

The mission of Beyond the Divide (BtD) is to incite sustainability – to raise awareness of the increasingly devastating effects worldwide of climate change, and to inspire an active effort for coordinated global mitigation and adaptation strategies. In particular, BtD seeks to generate support for the “canaries in the mine,” the Indigenous communities who are largely dependent on their ecosystems for subsistence, economic livelihood, and for the very survival of their age-old cultures.

To accomplish the mission, BtD is creating an innovative stage production and documentary film as a vehicle for international Indigenous musicians, storytellers and wisdom keepers to collaborate with renowned commissioned composers to create new music and images that reflect a vision of sustainability for future generations. The productions will highlight the efforts of selected indigenous communities to protect their bioregions and cultures. Each year, funds generated from the project will benefit indigenous groups from bioregions around the world whose projects to protect ecosystems and culture are significant models. BtD will premiere in 2012, possibly at the Earth Summit – Rio+20.

Regardless of where in the world they live or the traditions they follow, Indigenous peoples have a commonality of worldview, beliefs and values that honor our connectedness to all of Nature. With current and future generations in mind, they recognize that their health depends on the Earth’s health.

Many of these place-based, natural resource-dependent cultures are already experiencing the effects of environmental degradation, including from climate change. While indigenous people may be the unwilling “canaries in the mine,” all of us will experience the increasingly severe effects – human induced or not – unless we change.

Ironically, these endangered Indigenous cultures are potential agents of solutions, leadership, climactic wisdom and untapped contributions to address the contemporary global climate change crisis. Inspired by traditional teachings, Indigenous leaders promote concepts that are locally controlled, decentralized, bioregionally appropriate and socially just.

Respected Native American and indigenous advisors have been offering support and ideas for the creation of BtD since the project’s inception. An Advisory Council composed of indigenous leaders and performance professionals, as well as individuals from nonprofit organizations and corporate sponsors, is being created to help guide BtD’s development, as well as the selection of indigenous projects that will directly benefit from BtD’s efforts. Students from the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) will be contributing to the development of the production. Production personnel will include members of the Native communities represented.

To maximize BtD’s impact, partner organizations will facilitate forums and workshops held in conjunction with the events to generate ideas, leadership, educational materials and support for ecological mitigation, adaptation and cultural preservation initiatives. The following nonprofit organizations are, as of this writing, in the process of finalizing their commitment to become a partner organization: Americans for Indian Opportunity, The Cultural Conservancy, Futures for Children, IAIA, The New Mexico Community Foundation, The Santa Fe Concert Association.

Beyond the Divide is a project of Bridges to Sustainability Institute (BRIDGES), a 501(c)3 organization. Funding is being sought from private, foundation and corporate sources.

More information can be found at www.beyondthedivide.org

BACKGROUND

Beyond the Divide that separates cultures, generations, ideologies and politics, there is a common thread in our roots and psyches that values the Earth as the nurturer of all life. At our core, we must all know that as the Earth goes, so go we. We are all connected.

It is important to realize that, with future generations in mind, there are some cultures that have maintained an interdependent relationship with the Earth for millennia. Despite great obstacles and attempts at changing their Native ways, many indigenous peoples continue to practice traditions of stewardship. And while most of us have not been listening, for decades they have been urgently issuing warnings and prophecies, and speaking out about the plight of their communities as they experience a changing climate and degradation of their ecosystems.

Indigenous cultures globally are often among the first to feel the effects of environmental degradation, whether it is rising sea levels that inundate coastal and island nations, drought from diminished rain or snowfall, loss of oxygen-generating rainforests and their related flora and fauna, changing oceans and their bounty due to acidification, loss of community from wildfires, or lack of potable water. The list goes on. While indigenous people may be the unwilling “canaries in the mine,” all of us will experience the increasingly severe effects of climate change – human induced or not – unless we change.

The degree to which we can mitigate the causes and effects of climate change – severe storms, floods, drought, water shortages, mass extinctions, the spread of disease, crop losses and hunger, mass migrations of people, and ensuing economic, social conflict and war – depends on how soon and how significantly we can create a shift in awareness and act to re-balance our relationship to the Earth.

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES OFFER SOLUTIONS

Regardless of where in the world they live or the traditions they follow, indigenous peoples have a commonality of worldview, beliefs and values that honor our connectedness to all of Nature. With current and future generations in mind, they recognize that their health depends on the Earth’s health.

Native people are concerned about a world that privatizes the air, water and commodifies the sacredness of Mother Earth. Indigenous spokespeople have said that it seems the leaders of the world are more concerned about making money than solving the climate crisis. They believe that there are many false market-based solutions being promoted to stop global warming.

Often at international climate meetings, as well as political and economic summits, indigenous communities have not had a voice. In 2009 there was a summit in Alaska called the Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change. Indigenous peoples from throughout the Americas and throughout the world participated. There they created the “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.” An excerpt:

“Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but in climate crisis. We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the elements of life.”

Ironically, these endangered cultures are the ones that have maintained viable models for solutions to the contemporary global climate change crisis. Inspired by traditional teachings, Indigenous leaders are promoting things such as: re-localization of food production and consumption, prioritizing local markets and cooperative economies; decentralized utility systems, transitioning to sustainable, renewable energy; rights-based resource conservation that enforces indigenous land rights; and a massive reforestation effort managed primarily by indigenous forest-dwelling peoples. Further, indigenous leaders are requesting that those who have most contributed to the climate crisis support indigenous communities in their efforts to adapt to a rapidly changing climate.

“Unless the human family can understand the need to protect its elder cultures from which all of our contemporary societies have emerged, the human family will have no future at all.”

– David Monongye, Hopi Elder (1986)

BEYOND THE DIVIDE STAGE AND FILM PRODUCTIONS

Beyond the Divide will be an innovative multimedia experience – both stage production and documentary film. Unique, improbable pairings of performers from diverse backgrounds will entertain, inform and inspire.

BtD is bringing together native wisdom keepers, scientists, musicians, photographers and filmmakers to create messages, music and imagery with and for Native people. Renowned musicians are collaborating with indigenous musicians from different bioregions to compose and perform new music. What will emerge will be a unique musical performance that blends spoken words with multimedia imagery – a performance that speaks to hearts and minds – telling a story to inspire creative solutions and hope for future generations.

The stage production may become an annual event presented at a variety of venues. We are seeking a broadcast deal for the BtD film. Funds generated from the film, stage productions and CD music sales will benefit 4 to 6 indigenous groups from bioregions around the world whose projects to protect ecosystems and Native cultures are significant models.

PRODUCTION TEAM

BtD's Partner organizations being confirmed at the time of this writing include: *Americans for Indian Opportunity, The Cultural Conservancy, Futures for Children, Institute of American Indian Arts, The New Mexico Community Foundation, and The Santa Fe Concert Association.*

To maximize BtD's impact, some of our partner organizations will facilitate an educational component of the project. Through forums and workshops held in conjunction with the film screenings and stage productions, they will seek to generate ideas and support for ecological mitigation/adaptation and cultural preservation initiatives. This process will include the development of curriculum materials.

Respected Native American and indigenous consultants have been offering support and ideas for the creation of BtD since the project's inception. An Advisory Council composed of indigenous leaders and performance professionals, as well as individuals from nonprofit organizations and corporate sponsors is being created to help guide BtD's development.

The Advisory Council will:

- Provide input regarding creative direction
- Provide input on cultural and Native music protocol
- Provide introductions to funding sources
- Assist in marketing the production
- Develop strategies for long-term impacts of sustainability initiatives and cultural preservation efforts
- Help evaluate the success of various aspects of the production
- Help evaluate the indigenous projects under consideration as beneficiaries

Students from the Institute of American Indian Arts will contribute to the development of the production and participating in its implementation. Interns from some of the cultures represented in the production will be employed as part of the production staff.

BtD's MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Environmental and cultural initiatives instigated as a result of the project
- Number of Indigenous communities and projects assisted by BtD
- Funds raised as to directly support Native environmental and cultural initiatives

- Number of people exposed to BtD via screenings and broadcasts, attendance at stage productions, hits on the website, number of people participating in BtD forums and workshops, and distribution of music CDs created by the project
- Level of collaboration with partner organizations (e.g. student involvement, number of workshops, symposia, etc.)
- Development and use of curriculum materials in educational institutions
- Successful cross-cultural collaboration of artists in creating new music

FUNDING FOR BEYOND THE DIVIDE

Beyond the Divide is a project of the Bridges to Sustainability Institute, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Funding is being sought from private, foundation and corporate sources. All donations to the Bridges to Sustainability Institute are tax-deductible.

Please consider joining us to help make Beyond the Divide possible.

For more information, contact:

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CLIMATE CHANGE INFORMATION

"Projected climate changes during the 21st century have the potential to lead to future large-scale and possibly irreversible changes in Earth systems, resulting in impacts on continental and global scales."

– Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2001)

The IPCC concluded in 2007 that warming of the climate system is now “unequivocal,” based on observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level. The IPCC also concluded that most of the observed warming in global average surface temperature that has occurred since the mid-20th century is very likely a result of human activities. During the last century, there was likely less human impact on the observed warming, and natural variations, such as the amount of radiation received from the sun, likely played a more significant role.

2011 was the 10th warmest year on record and among a total of 13 years since 1997 that are among the warmest since 1850. In 2011 the US broke the record for billion-dollar weather-related disasters with at least a dozen, including an onslaught of twisters, floods, snow, drought, heat and wildfires. There has been a rise in weather-related disasters since 1970.

"Research to attribute the causes of climate change shows clear evidence of human influences on the climate system due to changes in greenhouse gases, aerosols and stratospheric ozone."

– US Environmental Protection Agency

The world's human population is spewing nearly one and a half times the amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that it did 20 years ago, according to a report released in conjunction with the UN Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. The report predicts that greenhouse gas emissions are likely to continue increasing at a rate of about 3 percent per year.

Concentrations of carbon dioxide and other climate-altering gasses are rapidly approaching the levels that are predicted to cause a 2- to 2.4-degree Celsius rise in average global temperatures. World Meteorological Organization Deputy Secretary-General Jerry Lengoasa said at the Climate Conference in Durban that this is the level “scientists believe could trigger far-reaching and irreversible changes in our Earth, biosphere and oceans.”

If it is not halted, climate change will likely result in increased frequency and severity of storms, floods, drought, and water shortage; mass extinction of species, the spread of disease, crop losses and increased hunger, displacement and mass migrations of people, and ensuing economic, social conflict and war.

As stated in the (2006) Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change, “The benefits of strong, early action considerably outweigh the costs.” The Review concluded that fighting global warming would cost 1 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while non-action could lead to 20 percent loss of GDP in the long term.

Meanwhile, countries have failed to meet their pledges, missed targets and broken promises. Some reputable scientists say we now have 5 years to avoid irreversible climate change. Unfortunately, the 2011 Durban conference has officially delayed concrete action for years, just when the physical limits of our planet are being dangerously breached. Given the state of politics in this country, the US will not negotiate anything they can't pass domestic legislation to support. Long-term thinking is considered radical. It is clear that officials will not act until We the People create serious political pressure while developing successful models everywhere for a low-carbon economy. Some of those models can be gleaned from indigenous cultures.

2011 UNDP Report—Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All

“Sustainability is not exclusively or even primarily an environmental issue”, says United Nations Development Programme Administrator Helen Clark in the foreword to the 2011 Report—Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All, a publication of the UNDP (<http://hdr.undp.org>). “This report persuasively argues that it is fundamentally about how we choose to live our lives, with an awareness that everything we do has consequences for the seven billions of us here today, as well as for the billions more who will follow, for centuries to come.”

High living standards need not be carbon-fueled and follow the examples of the richest countries, says the report, presenting evidence that while CO₂ emissions have been closely linked with national income growth in recent decades, fossil-fuel consumption does not correspond with other key measures of human development, such as life expectancy and education. In fact, many advanced industrial nations are reducing their carbon footprints while maintaining growth.

“Growth driven by fossil fuel consumption is not a prerequisite for a better life in broader human development terms,” Clark said. “Investments that improve equity—in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare—could advance both sustainability and human development.”

The report states that environmental sustainability can be most fairly and effectively achieved by addressing health, education, income, and gender disparities together with the need for global action on energy production and ecosystem protection. The report argues that health and income advancement in developing countries are jeopardized by inaction on climate change and habitat destruction. Half of all malnutrition worldwide is attributable to environmental factors, such as water pollution and drought-driven scarcity, perpetuating a vicious cycle of impoverishment and ecological damage, the report notes.

As the world community prepares for the landmark UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, the report argues that sustainability must be approached as a matter of basic social justice, for current and future generations alike.

Africa, Asia

The UNDP report’s authors forecast that unchecked environmental deterioration—from drought in sub-Saharan Africa to rising sea levels that could swamp low-lying countries like Bangladesh—could cause food prices to soar by up to 50 percent and reverse efforts to expand water, sanitation and energy access to billions of people, notably in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

By 2050, in an “environmental challenge” scenario factoring in the effects of global warming on food production and pollution, the average Human Development Index (HDI) would be 12 percent lower in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa than would otherwise be the case, the report estimates. Under an even more adverse “environmental disaster” situation—with vast deforestation, dramatic biodiversity declines and increasingly extreme weather—the global HDI would fall 15 percent below the baseline projection for 2050, with the deepest losses in the poorest regions.

The American Southwest

There is substantial evidence that the past two centuries were the wettest period of the past 1,500 years in the Southwest. Tree ring data suggests that recent decades had rainfall 23 percent above the long-term New Mexico average. The implication of this and other long-term climate data is that farms, cities and irrigation networks of the modern Southwest were built on rivers swollen by unusually wet weather. Vegetation in such critical watersheds as the Rio Grande and Colorado River basins is apt to change in the near future. The future impacts of climate on the Colorado Plateau are complicated by current and projected global warming and intensified land use.

The Arctic

Average temperatures in the Arctic have increased at almost twice the global rate in the past 100 years. – US Environmental Protection Agency

"At one point the heat cover – it was above 100 degrees F, and it just killed all the fish in the lake through heat exposure. And we've experienced extreme heat waves. We've got four healthy seasons, winter, spring, summer and fall and now sometimes it comes too late - like right now it's coming too late. I've seen a lot of new growth of vegetation come into our area. Other insects and other birds and animals start coming in. Tree beetles came in and ruined a lot of trees in Alaska and they had to be cut down. And due to all the water draining, there's a high potential for forest fires. There have been a lot of forest fires in our area. Also a lot of ice is melting sooner when the end of the summer comes around."

– Sarah James (Gwich'in), Alaska