

Transcript of Solo Interview with Anja Daniel

conducted by Peter Sky and D.S. Fine



Photograph by Holly Lynn Danyliw

Do you feel you're a child of nature?

A child of nature, yes, – but i think we all are. i think we all are children of the Earth. We come up with religions and different philosophies, but in the end we all are one. We all just have one Mother, really. This is one song...

[singing]

“So many people in different ways of life,

So many people in different ways of life.

There's only one mother,

There's only one mother.

So many people in different ways of life,

So many people in different ways of life.

There's only one mother,

There's only one mother.”

...but, it's a good question as i, um, within those first several months when i tried to, you know, left school and everything behind, – my dream was to either live in the mountains of France and become a shepherd or to really go into the woods and try to live with the Earth, to eat from the wild and learn the old skills. So i hitchhiked to France and i looked for an herbalist. And what my dream was: to meet an old woman that would just teach me.

So i went into the woods and i camped there and i got really tired and i realized i was still *so* dependent on our civilization. i was still dependent on the certain comfort we have, so i was, in a way, very disappointed that i felt i wasn't able yet to do the step of just to leave everything. And after a while of traveling, i did go back to Germany and i still lived very simply, – but not totally away from everything. Which was always my dream, – to just live, – be able to just live in the woods, without anything. You know, gathering your own food and not being dependent on anything of the Western world.

But, i realized i was raised in this culture and there will always be some kind of dependency, – because that's the thing that's familiar. So that was actually hard to feel that i'm still so dependent.

And then i came here to Touchstone, – that was also my dream. i wanted to live in the woods and i was a little disappointed this is in the suburbs, so i went to Vermont... tried different places there, – but i realized... Shaker actually really helped me, and he showed me it's not about just living away from all of it. To find a balance... to find a balance between the two worlds. So, in here [Touchstone] you still have the connection to the Earth, but you're also not too far away from the

worldly things, which i think is good, – not to be too isolated.

...Isn't that something like Jesus said: to be “in the world, but not *of* the world?”...

...i really wanted to have my own trailer, – that was one of my dreams.

And somebody said, “you know, Anja if you really want something you can get it within 3 days, – if you really want it and put all your intention on it.” So, i threw something into the fire that night and prayed for a trailer, and within 3 days i had one!...

But the loneliness, you know, it still comes... i think it will always be there. In a way, we're all alone, – we are “all-one,” – but we're also all alone. But, when i feel that, it really helps me to be with the Earth, you know, to do something in the garden, or to walk into the woods and just be quiet, – and maybe wait for an animal, or just... it always helps to be with the Earth.

Why do you think it's important to preserve nature?

There's a beautiful song which is from Chief Seattle that is really the answer. This is written by this, um, Chief in Washington State. i don't know if it was 1800's, – as the government of the United States asked him to sell the land that he was living on. He said: “How can I sell the land? How can I sell the air? How can I sell the buffalo?” These were his words...

[singing and playing guitar]

“Every part of the Earth is sacred to my people,

We are part of the Earth and She is part of us,

All things share the same breath...”

...i really feel that we are all one, – the trees and the animals, the people, – we create a web on the Earth. So, if we destroy the trees, we destroy ourselves. We won't have air to breathe, – clean air. If we destroy the animals, we also hurt our own souls and

we won't have anything to eat. If we destroy the soil, we won't have any place to live on or to eat from. If we destroy the ocean, we will destroy the cycle of life, – so whatever we do to the Earth, we really do to ourselves... So, without the Earth, we can't survive. The Earth can survive without us, – but, we cannot survive without the Earth.

...i don't even feel it's my music. People say: “Oh, you sing so beautiful.” But, i don't feel like it's me, you know, – it's just being open to, maybe, the gifts that are given that come through. i think to just... if you can just be open and don't have any expectations, – and just let things flow, – you have creative energy.

Do you believe in Muses? ...Something or some spirit that inspires people, – personified?

You mean like Devas? Yah, i do know that they're around. A lot of people say they've come here, walking through gardens, – especially around the medicine wheel, – that they feel Devas there. They even had dreams at night, sleeping near the medicine wheel, where Devas came into their dreams. Some people sat in the flower gardens, in the little garden, – or even out here, we had lots of flowers, – that they could feel plant spirits. That it reminded them of Findhorn, – this place in Scotland where, ah, a lot of, a lot of focus is on the plant spirits and the Devas.

Do you believe in angelic spirits, – have you ever had an angelic experience?

You know what? – i've never really seen anything. It's just a feeling, um, no, i haven't. i think i've had the connection to the nature spirits, – than angelic, – and, again, i have not seen any. It's just a feeling.

i feel that the Church has really put down the word: “witch.” In all the fairy tales, we hear the witches are the bad ones, and i think that Christianity really, ah, destroyed, changed the meaning of “witch.” They really wanted to get rid of nature people, because they could fear what the people of the Earth would, um, be like, if they would be just... let be, – that their power would become less, – and people wouldn't believe them anymore. So they tried to get rid of them and put bad meanings on, you know, certain words. -- So the witch became this bad thing. And people are still influenced by it. They feel like a witch still is a dark, you know, dark, old woman, –

or a bad woman. But she was really the wise one. She was the one who lived in the woods where would people go to, – to get help. She was the midwife. She was still the one who was in tune with the Earth. Originally, we had them everywhere. “Witch” was just the woman of the Earth, or man of the Earth, – who we all were... but, because certain people wanted to be in power, the inquisition wanted to make money, control others, – we, uh, created this, this fear around it. Yah, the witches, in a way, were the visionaries.

...But we do celebrate the old Celtic rituals here. We do offer a fire for the equinox, – and the beautiful Winter Solstice where we all dress in white. 80 people, – but it's not a cult or out of a certain philosophy. It's, it's just to... to celebrate life...

Definitely, everyone is welcome here, – there's no... we don't exclude anyone.

...There have been people here who are... who might be in the government, – who have big positions in an oil company. And then there have been people who just wandered in right from the street like a beggar who didn't have anything. We really have people, we have Jews, we have Christians, we have pagans. Um, i think people really feel welcomed here from all traditions. We don't exclude anyone.

...Religion really gets in the way. If you just believe in one way. That's why the dance is so beautiful, – because i feel like music and dance unites people. You actually can let go of all your beliefs and you just become One. You just share and can let go of all other barriers. It's that one time when you dance together and sing together you come to that place of unity.

What types of things make you happy?

...Just being here when everyone is here on the farm makes me laugh. The people are... just their harmony. And i feel really light here with the people who live here. It doesn't always happen out in the world. Only with.... around certain people i feel really relaxed. And maybe here, i've been here so long and, really, the people who live here are all certain characters. We're all kind of characters, clowns, children. Eugene just said: “everyone here is a kid.” i think everyone really lives their passion and do what they love and that keeps them young, – and in this joyful place.

You speak of traveling. Where do you go?

We travel through United States and teach workshops of Sacred Dance. We call it The Long Dance or The Breath of the Dance which has its roots in the neolithic times... i believe that in the neolithic times, we have proof that there were villages where the dance never stopped for hundreds of years. There were always somebody dancing in the temple... That goes back to 10,000 BC, maybe even longer.

...The Long Dance, – it's a form of dance where sometimes a dance might come to me for an hour and you do the same movement. You really go in another space...

But the dance is very powerful. We have done it now for over 10 years, every Friday and Saturday night. Friday night is The Long Dance. And, Saturday: The Breath of the Dance, which is a mix between folk dance, dance of universal peace and Sufi dance and meditative dance. And, often, we have live music. i play guitar and sing for that. And i had a little band with other musicians for 2 years, and it really brings people together. And you can feel now we have not had the dance as much. It's really missing. It really keeps the place alive and it draws in people from all over the world. We have people come from Europe and Canada, South America... They come to dance...

Are there relationships happening between members here?

Well, most people are hermits, – meaning: they like their solitude, – and living alone, and are single... Actually most of the people that live here are not in a relationship, – i mean, we're always in a relationship, all of us, aren't we? Everyone? Even at your work. Not meaning like intimately, like sexually, – but, we all are always relating. You can even, if you lock yourself away somewhere, you're still in a relationship with the world, – so... but, meaning: intimate relationships, – they are people who have been partners for a long time. Ah, there's one relationship, they've been together for 8 years, um...

What about in the other house?

Actually, most people live like monks here and nuns.

Not so much sex?

No, – people have that idea this is like, um, a place where everyone sleeps with each other. That's really not true. People are really considerate and know that if you do that and you live together it can create, – if it doesn't work, – it can create a lot of tension, so really, are very careful with that. And, mostly, people, if they do share, actually turns into a really committed relationship. It's not just kind of everyone's sleeping with each other. That's definitely not happening.

Do you think the Spirit that exists here, for example, could spread throughout the world?

Definitely, definitely. i think, for a lot of people they say: just knowing that Touchstone is here, it makes them feel lighter in their life, – so i do think it does spread. And i think it... i mean, i wasn't around in the 60's, but i can imagine it does have some energy of that.

You were saying before that sometimes you don't like to look in mirrors, – because you feel that you're interacting...

...i don't really like mirrors because they don't really reflect us back. i feel the best mirrors are your friends, are the people around you. Because they see you much different and reflect your true being. The mirror doesn't reflect your true being, really. And if you're very judgmental in your mind you can make up things against yourself. Like the Native Americans, they didn't believe in photographs or filming or mirrors because they felt it was stealing the soul. So the best mirror are your friends because they reflect you back, – who you really are.

So, perhaps, the people here tell you who you are?

It's not like that we say that every day, you know? But, just through the smiles and the laughter and the sharings you feel, you feel good, – and happy.

...There's always sorrow, i think. i mean, there's always happiness and sorrow at the same time, i think. But, if you have laughter in your life, that it's just such a gift, it's amazing.

Do you see yourself as a Founding Mother?

At Touchstone? That's what Shaker says. He feels that Touchstone wouldn't be there where it is now, without me. He felt that i brought the music. There was no music yet, – so i guess, yah, i am the founding mother of Touchstone.

...He feels it's really good for communities to have a king and a queen who only interfere when it's needed. They wouldn't just make rules. But once in a while you have situations it's really nice not having committee... Like a certain person walks down the driveway and you just feel it wouldn't be right, you know, for them maybe to stay. There's certain situations where it's really good to have somebody that you trust, – that they make the right decision... Or sometimes people want to live here and you just feel it if it's right. You just have a certain instinct. i guess, in the Baha'i tradition, they also always elect a queen and a king every year. And they elect the ones who don't want to do the job. They feel that those are the best.

Do you believe that every creature [such as this bug on the floor] is sacred, – that you wouldn't literally hurt them?

...i think the animals have so much to teach us, but, i don't know, we get so caught up in worldly matters. And again, going into that world is like alpha. And our western culture is so into beta, – all is linear, drive, work, achieve. But, the native people and the babies are all in alpha and that's the natural state of being. So, if we sit with an animal, we get into alpha, – but to do that “switch” sometimes is a little hard. Or, if you take a song and you go into alpha. And they say we have much higher abilities to heal ourselves in alpha.

...They have their own universe inside these little beings. There's so much for them to learn, you know, we never take the time. Like children are much more in their place of alpha, where they can just be with the animals. i think the animals have a lot to teach us and i never take the time, really, to really... to just sit.

What are some of your hopes?

i hope for peace on the Earth, in the world. That's always my main prayer. That all

beings may be free from suffering. There's no more violence, no more torture, no more rape... i always pray that my family will be, you know, strong and healthy... i hope that this eco-village will happen on the farm, but, Inshallah, you know, we have certain dreams and wishes. But, in a way, you have to also surrender it to God because you don't know if that's the good thing for you. You might think: "i want this" or: "this would be nice," – but, would that be really good? We have no idea what is really good for us. Like, you know, you want a certain relationship, or you think this would be wonderful, and you get sad that you can't get it, maybe... But, who knows, – maybe it's actually saving you from something? So, always... to get the bigger picture.

Have you ever felt you've transcended?

i think we transcend all the time. i definitely feel going through different stages that there's always... that we always become a different person. Especially when i travel. Every time i go back to Germany, – i come back, i feel like everything is different now. Come to a different place. We are never the same, are we? i mean we're always so different. We go through different patterns, different emotional states. But, in a way, it's a spiral, too... Don't we always end up in the same place again?

What does enlightenment mean to you?

Bliss. Constant bliss. No judgment. Be free from suffering. Being able to embrace everything. Not to be attached. Not to be jealous. Not to be afraid. Be free from all the tricks of the mind. And just love, – to really love, unconditionally. Love everyone, everything.

If you were in a state of transcendence, how would it feel?

...To make music, dance, – the dance really helps. The dance, – with the Circle Dance with everyone, – that really transcends every time, actually. If you're stuck in a certain emotional place and you do the dance, you share in the dance, – it goes away, – you come to a different place. It's like rebirth. i think that's why people really miss the dance, because it helps them to let go of whatever they get caught in the mind. It's just off in the mind, anyways, – it's all not *real*, whatever we go through, it's really... you just make it up, – it's like old patterns playing, playing up

again and again. We think it's real, but it's not really real. So the dance really helps. You, suddenly... again, i think you come into alpha, and in alpha they say you transcend much faster. You can just let go of who you think you are.

Would you like to be a mother one day?

i don't think so. Well, we *are* a mother... i mean, i feel like a mother, in a way. Because there's so much to nurture here. And, there's so many ways to mother, to be a mother, you don't.... having a child, – it's one way. It's one way of living. Creative energy. But, we have now the chance to create in so many different ways, like we haven't had before in a long time. Women were kind of pushed into that place. You were either... you're only a good woman if you're a mother, – you're a real woman if you're a mother, – or, you're a nun. You have, like, these two options, – but there wasn't much in between. So, now we have a freedom to choose what we want to create. ...But, right now i feel like my calling is, in a way, my calling is to nurture through teaching the dance and singing. i know that's my way, right now.

How do you feel about woman's liberation?

i think it's great! i think it's important that women are equal to men, that they have the same rights and are seen as equals. Because women are really the life-givers, so they, um, should be treated the same, maybe even more. [laughter]

If you had to describe your personality, how would you describe it?

It's so hard, again, – that's “the mirror thing.” Sometimes, people say really nice things to me. What they feel who i am. i'm so grateful because of what they tell me, 'cause i don't really see that, – i don't. i don't know who i am, what i'm doing. i don't really see sometimes, my own, what my own being does. Like with the music. It's a play between the people who listen and me, – or the spirit that moves through all things. You know, if the people really listen, the music comes out so differently than if nobody listens. So, again, i don't even feel it's me who sings. It's, again, that spirit that moves through all things. But my personality, – again, we transcend all the time, so some people meet me and they think i'm 18 and some people meet me and they think i'm 45. We are always in different phases. When i travel, i appear very different than when i am here on the farm. i'm more in that Gypsy place, a

wanderer. Here sometimes i can get quite heavy, you know, emotionally staying always in one place. Maybe more earthy, grounded. But, you came in here and you said this is very airy in here. So maybe i'm quite airy. [laughter]

i feel like i'm a dreamer. My father, he said once... he looked at this painting with a beautiful nature, like a river and a house, and the trees near the river, and he said this is my dream: a world with the nature from yesterday and the people from tomorrow.

Are you religious?

No. i feel like i am a woman of the Earth. If i had a, like... the closest religion would be the Native Americans, i think, but i really don't have one religion. i just feel like the Earth... i believe in the Earth... Nature.

You don't see yourself a spiritual person?

People say that. People say: "oh you're a hippie, you're spiritual." i never, i cannot put myself... i feel so much, like, often, *One*, with everyone. i feel everyone is the same. i never saw myself so differently from others. Even though, often, when i go into the town, and i do feel a little insecure, – sometimes i feel like a stranger. But, people do call me... i think, they say i'm spiritual and i guess i am. But, i never put myself in those categories, you know?

What touches your soul? What makes you cry?

Those are two good questions... [sigh] What makes me cry?... Oh, my God. Seeing... seeing an elderly man in Palestine, like, crying for his wife they just killed, or son they just brought to a prison in Israel for no reason. Seeing that old man walking down the street, like, with a bent back... having taken everything from him. Or seeing all the Palestinians on the street with a... tray that they carried this one little girl that was just killed. Like every day, one child gets killed there. That makes me cry. Or seeing the maimed children in Afghanistan. Or... the people killed in Iraq somewhere on a road. Or even when i see an old man walking down here, alone on the street, who can't walk so well, anymore. Just that... that loneliness there, – that really makes me cry, that makes me very sad.

...God, i could tell so many things about what makes one cry... But, i think what moves my soul are love letters [laughter]... i go every day to the mailbox, i look for a love letter. 'Cause i used to... i always wrote love letters. Like, from when i was 14 to 18, i just fell in love so much. Even though i never really had a relationship. But, i just felt always this love for so many people. So i always wrote love letters. But, they never wrote them to me. Rarely. i mean, there were some, but... when i was 15, i saw this big writing on the wall in Germany, – it said: “Write love letters and save the tenderness.”

So, if somebody comes to my room and brings me tea, a cup of tea. Or, makes me a meal in the morning. Or, i get a love letter. Or, like, sometimes somebody brings a little flower... Isn't that the best in the world? i mean, those little offerings. That's so simple. Just a cup of tea. Just *so* much. That moves my heart. And then, just the feeling of love, feeling of being in love. – Isn't that wonderful? It's kind of what i live for, i think.

Have you been in love, in your life?

Yah, many times. [laughter]

Has it been satisfying, fulfilling, – and made you feel whole?

It seems to be that i'm happier alone. And it seems that i love the feeling of being in love, but, being in a long-term relationship, – even though... i assume it's so much what my soul wants, in some ways, – it seems to restrict me from being who i am...

But, i used to fall in love so much more, it's like actually getting... it's changing over the last several years. i think because, you know, you get hurt and attached and it seems like “relationship” doesn't keep me in a light space. You know, you have a lot of things come up and it gets more heavy and there's more fear of losing the person you love... And, so i feel, often, my true being is much more when i'm alone...

It's that balance. Sometimes you also want some closeness. Or some kind of warmth. But, you have to find that balance.

And, i love... i love my freedom. i love... when i'm by myself, – i have a certain freedom. And when you're in a relationship you're kind of more... you're not as independent, really. Even if you want to be, – and, for me, it just gets so deep, emotionally.

What do you find most fulfilling?

To be in love. [laughter]

Oh, you should ask Kelly about this about me. He said, “Anja, you should become a professional love letter writer.” [laughter] And teach people how to write love letters. He called and he said, “Hi, beautiful, are you thinking again? Are you writing love letters?”

i wrote a love letter to, um, this famous actor. [laughter] And i asked him if he would spend an evening of dance with me. Um, he's a dancer, i don't know his name. You know him... i don't even know him, – Antonio something?

Banderas?

Yah, yah. i saw, like, an ad in a paper and, you know, i don't ever read any newsletters or... So, i was on a plane, and it said he was a dancer and so i thought maybe, maybe he would spend an evening of dance with me. So then i wrote him... And i sent him a CD... and he didn't write back.

And i sent one to Al Gore, not a love letter, i just asked Al Gore if, if he... needs a musician that travels with him, and plays music for his documentations about saving the planet.

And i wrote a love letter, – not really a love letter, – a letter to [Dennis] Kucinich, two years ago, – and asked him if he needs a personal cook and a musician for his road...

So, when i feel inspired, i just, kind of, i feel like we should... we only have this moment to live. You know, it might be over tomorrow, – so, i want to be able to have said everything i want to say...

Do you think there is one person for each person?

i think there could be... if you feel a longing inside, i feel like there is, there *is* a person. But not everyone has that longing. But, i feel there are certain people that really influence our lives strongly. i mean, just coming here, being kind of led here and meeting Shaker... And him and us creating this... There is some soul-mate connection, i feel, even though we're not in an intimate relationship, – but, this is definitely a very... a soul-mate, in a way... So it can manifest in different ways. It doesn't always have to be marriage, or having a family and children.

Have you ever experienced a miracle?

i think when i can play in the ocean, – and be a mermaid. [laughter] When i can be with my friends. We were just on Nantucket and i was just *so* happy just running on the beach with my friends and jumping in the water all naked by myself. And become One with the ocean and swim and play like mermaids and go into other worlds... and dreams.

But, i'm really happy when i'm here with my friends. Like this Saturday we had a great gathering and we were just laughing the whole afternoon. Just laughing and telling stories.

There's no other place i need to go. You know, i've traveled so much i don't feel, like, – a calling, anymore, – like i need to go anywhere. i feel like everything is here.

Do you believe in the power of prayer?

Yes, definitely. i think prayer is one of the highest resources we have. We all can “do” it, and it definitely has, um... everything can become true that you believe in, – if you just pray for it, believe in it. Like some people say the only way we can heal the Earth now is on a spiritual level, – through prayer and dance, – song and ritual.

What legacy would you like to leave behind at this farm?

A happy village where people feel free to be who they are. Where the Earth is honored. Where people feel safe to come and be here and live here. Where the

animals and the plants are respected. Where we keep Sacred Space... A place where the dance never ends. You always feel you are in the dance. A place where the winds of grace are always blowing. Where people feel they can really find their Soul purpose. Where they can come to their true being. And a place where people live in harmony with each other. Where all beings are free from suffering. Where people play and sing and dance and heal each other. And where everything is seen as sacred. As Debbie says, or Shaker said, "Let every step be a prayer, – not because we are praying, – but, because we and the Earth are sacred."

...We are all visitors to this time, this place. We're just passing through. Our purpose is to learn, love, observe, grow, – and then, we return home.

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