

## ART: Music...passion...ecological literacy...action!

"A hush falls over the packed auditorium, and the excitement bubbling out of the kids on stage can hardly be contained. The lights go down, the musicians tune up. Holly Arntzen introduces a song and the concert begins with the whole school singing proudly together, for their family and friends, about the importance and beauty of the environment. The audience erupts in a standing ovation, the kids feel like a million bucks on stage, and the adults take home powerful messages of action and hope, delivered by relevant messengers — their children!" This is how Sue Staniforth describes a *Voices of Nature* concert in Victoria. It's no wonder the [Artist Response Team](#) (ART) is on the leading edge of eco-music in Canada.

Established in 1990 by Holly Arntzen and Stephen Foster, ART is a "cultural SWAT team" that responds peacefully to environmental issues through music, art, humour, and entertainment. Some of its offerings include educators' handbooks, CDs, live events, school music programs, and radio shows that feature musicians, artists, scientists, and children's choirs.

Holly and her colleague, producer Kevin Wright, and the world-class musicians of the Dream Band take young people on a journey of ecological exploration and discovery. Simply put, they help kids connect with their world and show them ways to protect it.

One tool they use is [Voices of Nature](#), a school music program developed by ART that combines youth choirs and bands, teachers, and entire school communities in the delivery of live concert performances. Music becomes the focal point for a cross-cultural, cross-curricular approach to learning about the environment. The ultimate goal is to move people to ecological action by weaving excellence in music and the arts, together with environmental and educational sciences and innovations in leadership and sustainable economic development.

*Voices of Nature* is being used as the centerpiece for public outreach and engagement at community environmental events and initiatives throughout western Canada. Over the past two years, ART has partnered with municipal and regional governments to embellish eco-celebrations such as the [Mayors' Environmental Expo in Kelowna](#), the [Meadowlark Festival in Penticton](#), the [Brant Wildlife Festival in Nanaimo](#), the Mission Zero Waste project in North Vancouver, and many others. In October 2008, ART joined forces with the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta to raise the profile of Sustainability Awareness Week on campus, and the ZeroFootprintEdmonton project. ART and the UofA are now planning a second year, which will see *Voices of Nature* embedded into education and music curriculum, as well as French and First Nations programs.



*The innovative learning programs Holly Arntzen developed with her late husband, Stephen Foster, and a virtual who's-who of environmental educators, have gained national recognition and popularity.*

*The success of Voices of Nature is driven by the fact that students love to sing Holly's songs, which motivate the decision-makers of tomorrow to communicate with the decision-makers of today. The result... inspired communities!*

*"At the Fresh Outlook Foundation's 2007 Building SustainAble Communities conference we performed with a small choir of students from Glenmore Elementary School," explains producer Kevin Wright. "The house was packed. We received two standing ovations from an audience that had no idea what to expect. The kids blew us away with their professionalism.*

*"After the performance, foundation founder and CEO Joanne de Vries asked the kids to go out into the crowd, look people straight in the eyes, and say, "we're counting on you." Watching the kids infiltrate the audience with confidence and vigor was one of the most magical things I've ever seen. It inspired us to write a new song, I Am the Future, which we are using as the title track for our next album.*

*"Building Sustainable Communities was the best conference I've ever been to, and we'll be back for the next one in February of 2009."*

*Holly and Kevin will perform and present a workshop on the importance of using cultural tools to enable and encourage community sustainability.*

*For conference information visit <http://www.freshoutlookfoundation.org/>. To register, visit [www.regonline.ca/bsc2009](http://www.regonline.ca/bsc2009)*

The engine of *Voices of Nature* is driven by the energy and pure passion of young people, singing and learning. The inspiration comes from fabulous live concerts with world-class musicians in professional theatres. The target audience is working professionals... people who have time only for their families and jobs. They don't go to environmental meetings, and they don't read government brochures... but they do pay attention when their children and grandchildren speak!

For more information about the Artist Response Team, contact Holly Arntzen and Kevin Wright at [artistresponseteam@shaw.ca](mailto:artistresponseteam@shaw.ca) or 250-544-4006.