

Fellow Amazon Conservationist,

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the musical healing traditions of the Amazon and our feature documentary and audio-visual archive, ***Spirit Songs: A Musical Taxonomy of the Amazon***.

In the Amazon a shaman's primary tool is his or her ability to channel spirits through song. These spirit songs, also known as *icaros*, have been described as the "*quintessence of shamanic power*" with the number of *icaros* a shaman knows being a measure of his/her power. Each plant and animal has a specific *icaro* and the melodies are believed to unlock their healing powers. Shamans do not see themselves as magicians, but rather as stewards of the *icaros* — a living body of healing and spiritual knowledge.

An elder shaman may know upwards of a 500 songs and possess the knowledge of how to use each *icaro* in combination with plant medicines to treat specific ailments. Unfortunately, with apprentices waning, many young and middle-aged shamans know less than 50 *icaros* and this number is lessening as accomplished healers pass away.

OUR INTENTIONS

To craft a feature documentary and build an updatable audio-visual archive highlighting the curative songs of the Amazon.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

- Teach viewers what an *icaro* is and how an *icaro* is learned.
- Investigate and report how *icaros* are used to promote healing in the Amazon.
- Investigate and report how/if specific *icaros* vary throughout the Amazon.
- Record, catalogue, and preserve shamanic and tribal songs of the Amazon in an updatable, public audio-visual archive.
- Document the completion of the Inter-Oceanic highway and the affects of industrialization on shamanic traditions in Peru's rainforest.
- Document local tribal perspectives on the change current road projects will bring to the rural northeast state of Loreto, Peru.
- Foster cultural exchange by making songs and tribal histories accessible to international audiences through live events, broadcast, online archiving, and DVD.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

March-April of 2009, our team returned to Peru to continue gathering footage and recording interviews and healing ceremonies with 11 accomplished shaman across four tribes in Loreto, Peru and two tribes in the path of the Inter-Oceanic Highway in the southeast state of Madre de Dios, Peru.

An essential stage of the industrialization of the Amazon is coming complete this year, the Inter-Oceanic Highway, which stretches from Atlantic to Pacific and has opened the forest to industry and to the slash-and-burn farming techniques of settlers. In Madre de Dios we traveled the last installations of the highway with indigenous leader and 2007 Goldman Award winner, Julio Cusurichi and again with officials from Odebrecht, the engineering company leading the highway project. We visited Arazaire, an ancient matriarchy literally bisected by the development project. We also visited wild brazil-nut harvesters in the process of gaining organic certification through the European Union that reported economic gains from the new highway.

In the less developed state of Loreto we traveled to remote tribal factions of Huitoto, Ocaina, Yagwa and Bora, recording songs, stories, and ceremonies in every village. We explored several successful commercial shamanic jungle lodges and met with their healers, Guerrero Arevalo, Percy Garcia, and Don Juan Tangoa Paima are just a few. We also reached out to Alan Shoemaker, who organizes the world's largest shamanic conference. Shoemaker provides an important connection to healers and to content, he has recorded thousands of ceremonies over the past two decades. Since our return we have published, *Welcome to the Jungle*, an LA Yoga magazine cover story on Amazonian shamanism.

In **October 2006**, our team researched and gathered footage throughout the northeast state of Loreto, Peru. Our trip included one week of field research with author/ethnobotanist James Duke, multiple ceremonies and interviews with three accomplished shaman, and a trek to visit a remote faction of the Bora tribe.

The Boras of Pevas are an Amazon tribe that still practice traditional dances and songs, and support themselves through farming, foraging, and selling artisan-made crafts. During our visit, the tribal elders expressed fear for the fate of the next generation of Boras — even their young chief-to-be takes frequent trips to the city to drink alcohol and has eschewed tribal healing for modern medicine. The elder Bora women angrily discussed how the female youth of their tribe are drawn or sometimes kidnapped into prostitution and typically held at nearby logging camps. In our research, we have repeatedly seen this trend of indigenous youth migrating to cities and away from traditional cultural practices, leaving elderly shamans as the keepers of this ancient knowledge.

For 7 days we traveled and studied with author/ethnobotanist, Dr. James Duke. Duke has 30 years of tropical field-work with the USDA under his belt and has written nearly 40 books about medicinal herbs, including *The Green Pharmacy*, which has sold over one million copies worldwide. He claims that the chemical analysis of these plants often tend to support their folk reputations. After this trip we published two short documentaries on the global cable news network, *Current: Icaros: Spirit Songs of the Amazon* and *Duke of Herbs*. Our research was also highlighted in LA Yoga magazine.

PROJECT STATUS

To date we've shot 70 hours of video, recorded audio of 40 hours of musical ceremony, shot over 2,500 photographs, and recorded hundreds of icaros across six indigenous languages.

As a continuation of filming, in October 2006 and April-May 2009, our team will return for three months to the Peruvian jungle in the Spring/Summer of 2010. In the southeastern state of Madre de Dios we will continue to document the effects of the Inter-Oceanic Highway on local tribes and Peru's stirring indigenous populace movement. In Loreto, Peru's largest and least developed state, we will travel deeper into the jungle to document the songs, stories and knowledge of elder healers across many traditions.

Please donate today and help us meet our objectives and complete the documentary and archive, ***Spirit Songs: A Musical Taxonomy of the Amazon***. Tax-deductible donations can be made easily online through our fiscal sponsor, Documentary Educational Resource at der.org or mailed to:

Documentary Educational Resources
101 Morse Street
Watertown, MA 02472

If you are mailing your donation be sure to write, "Spirit Songs: A Musical Taxonomy of the Amazon" on your check.

Gratefully Yours,

Ryan Wylie
Spirit Songs director

