

3 Minute Culture ©1990 Holly Arntzen/Stephen Foster

It's 1990. The Mulroney government has announced funding support for The Green Plan. The Artist Response Team has conceived of a project called EcoFest '91. A national broadcast campaign that will involve artists from coast to coast to coast singing songs about the Earth and delivering PSA's (Public Service Announcements) via radio and television. We've gathered together a library of Letters of Support from the likes of BC Premier Bill VanderZalm, Scientist David Suzuki and many, many more illustrious folks. Environment Canada had committed \$50,000 to this project that will ultimately see more than \$3.75 million raised in cash and in-kind support. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, and artists including Bruce Cockburn, Sue Medley, Mitsou and Barney Bentall, along with 50 others had signed on.

But the catch was...Stephen and I needed to fly out to Ottawa to sign the contract to bring the project into being. But we didn't have the money for the air tickets.

At that time we dealt with the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), where we had banked for the past several decades. We set up a meeting with our manager at the Vancouver 4th & Balaclava branch of RBC, Mr. Fred Wickett. We were sitting in Fred's office, across from him at his desk. It was a warm summer day. His office door was open. Out in the main area of the bank, there were multiple queues of people lined up to see tellers. This was back in the day when we all went in person to the bank to do our business.

We presented our case: we had a written commitment for \$50,000 from Environment Canada. We were requesting a line of credit for \$5,000 so we could buy air tickets to Ottawa and sign our contract. Fred listened, then he said, "Excuse me", and left the office. We sat and waited. When he came back he said, "I'm sorry, but we can't give you the line of credit for \$5,000." I imagined that he'd gone out to check our credit ratings, and artists probably ranked lower than drug dealers.

Stephen leaned forward and said, "This really pisses me off. You'll lend money to pesticide manufacturers, and look at the damage those poisons do to the environment. You'll lend money to car dealerships, and look at what carbon emissions are doing to our climate. You'll lend money to real estate speculators, and look at how many of them go tits up. But here we are, a couple of artists creating music to support the environment, with a \$50,000 contract confirmed from the government, and you won't give us a \$5,000 line of credit." Then he turned to me and said, "Holly, sing *3 Minute Culture*."

I shrank down into my chair, Oh no! Did I really have to do this? But I knew that if I didn't, my life would be hell for days, if not weeks, to come. So I sang, acapella.

My voice carried out into the lobby. All the people in the lobby went quiet, listening. When I sang the final lyrics *Everybody knows this is right...* Fred Wickett clapped his hands and said, "That's right!"

He approved our \$5,000 line of credit. And the rest, as they say, is history.