



Music and Poetry of the Kesh is the documentation of an invented Pacific Coast peoples from a far distant time, and the soundtrack of famed science fiction author, **Ursula K. Le Guin's** *Always Coming Home*. In the novel, the story of Stone Telling, a young woman of the Kesh, is woven within a larger anthropological folklore and fantasy.

The ways of the Kesh were originally presented in 1985 as a five hundred plus page book accompanied with illustrations of instruments and tools, maps, a glossary of terms, recipes, poems, an alphabet (Le Guin's conlang, so she could write non-English lyrics), and with early editions, a cassette of "field recordings" and indigenous song. Le Guin wanted to hear the people she'd imagined; she embarked on an elaborate process with her friend **Todd Barton** to invoke their spirit and tradition.

For *Music and Poetry of the Kesh*, the words and lyrics are attributed to Le Guin as composed by Barton, an Oregon-based musician, composer and Buchla synthesist (the two worked together previously on public radio projects). But the cassette notes credit the sounds and voices to the world of the Kesh, making origins ambiguous. For instance, "The River Song" description reads, "The prominent rhythm instrument is the doubure binga, a set of nine brass bowls struck with cloth-covered wooden mallets, here played by Ready."

According to writer and long-time friend of LeGuin, **Moe Bowstern** (who pens the liners for the *Freedom To Spend* edition of *Kesh*), Barton built and then taught himself to play several instruments of Le Guin's design, among them "the seven-foot horn known to the Kesh as the *Houmbúta* and the *Wéosai Medoud Teyahi* bone flute." Barton's crafting of original instruments lends an other-worldly texture to the recordings of the Kesh, not unlike fellow builders **Bobby Brown** and **Lonnie Holley**. Bowstern notes, "Other musician / makers have crafted their own Kesh instruments after encountering the earlier cassette recordings that accompanied some editions of the book."

Both Barton and Le Guin are sensitive to the sovereignty of indigenous Californians and were careful not to trample the traditions of the Tolowa people who lived in the valley long before the Kesh. "You research deeply, and then you bring your own voice to the table," said Barton. Within the Kesh culture, the numbers four and five shape the lives, society and rituals. Barton composed loosely around these numbers, patiently listening to the land of Napa Valley for signs and audio signals from the natural elements. Todd incorporated ambient sounds of the creek by Le Guin's house and a campfire they built together.

The songs of Kesh are joyful, soothing and meditative, while the instrumental works drift far past the imaginary lands. "Heron Dance" is an uplifting first track, featuring a *Wéosai Medoud Teyahi* (made from a deer or lamb thigh bone with a cattail reed) and the great *Houmbúta* (used for theatre and ceremony). "A Music of the Eighth House" sends gossamer waves of the faintest sounds to "float on the wind." Like the languages invented in the vocal work of **Anna Homer, Meredith Monk, and Elizabeth Fraser**, the Kesh songs and poems play with the shape of voice.

URSULA K. LE GUIN & TODD BARTON *MUSIC AND POETRY OF THE KESH*

The *Music and Poetry of the Kesh* cassette was meant to accompany and enhance the experience of reading *Always Coming Home*. Presented in this edition as a long-playing album, where only traces of the book linger (the jacket offers some of Le Guin's illustration, and a letterpressed bookmark featuring the the narrative modes of western civilization and the Kesh valley is included), the music alone breaking the silence of what might be. It can transport—offering a landscape for imagining a future homecoming. One in which we are balanced, peaceful, and tend to the earth and its creatures.

A line from the Sun Dance poem reminds us, "We are nothing much without one another." **Freedom To Spend** gives new life to the recordings of the Kesh people in the first ever vinyl edition of *Music and Poetry of the Kesh*, out on LP, and digital formats on March 23, 2018. The LP will include a deluxe spot printed jacket with illustrations from *Always Coming Home*, a facsimile of the original lyric sheet, liner notes by Moe Bowstern, multi-format digital download code and a limited edition bookmark letterpressed by **Stumptown Printers** in Portland, OR.

ARTIST HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ursula K. Le Guin** is an American author and illustrator best known for he works in the genres of fantasy and science fiction.
- Some of her most notable works include the *Earthsea* fantasy series, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, *The Lathe Of Heaven* and *Lavinia*, to name a few.
- In 2016 The New York Times named Le Guin "America's greatest living science fiction writer." She has won the Hugo Award, Nebula Award, Locus Award, and World Fantasy Award, each more than once, and was awarded the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. In 2013 she was named Grandmaster of Science Fiction by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America organization.
- **Todd Barton** is an American composer, sound designer, multimedia performer and analog synthesist specializing in Buchla electronic musical instruments.
- Barton has collaborated with a variety of jazz musicians and poets in addition to Le Guin including **Anthony Braxton**, **Zakir Hussein**, **William Stafford** and **Lawson Fusao Inada**. His compositions have been performed by the **Kronos Quartet**, **Oregon Symphony Orchestra**, **San Jose Chamber Orchestra**, **Southern Oregon Repertory Singers**, the **Shasta Taiko**, and the **Rogue Valley Symphony** among others.
- Le Guin's classic 1985 science-fiction novel *Always Coming Home*—surveying the life & culture of a group of far future humans called the Kesh—was originally published with an anthropological cassette tape, *Music and Poetry of the Kesh*.
- *Music and Poetry of the Kesh* features music by Todd Barton and words by Ursula K. Le Guin, who also performs many of the pieces. The collection of music includes songs, poems, and dance ceremonies all purportedly recorded on site of the Kesh people.
- **Freedom To Spend** gives new life to the recordings of the Kesh people in the first ever vinyl edition of *Music and Poetry of the Kesh*, out on LP, and digital formats on March 23, 2018. The LP will include a deluxe spot printed jacket with illustrations from **Always Coming Home**, a facsimile of the original lyric sheet, liner notes by **Moe Bowstern**, multi-format digital download code and a limited edition bookmark letterpressed by **Stumptown Printers** in Portland, OR.

Track Listing

01. Heron Dance
02. Twilight Song
03. Yes—Singing
04. Dragonfly Song
05. A Homesick Song
06. The Willows
07. Lullaby—Lahela
08. Long Singing
09. The Quail Song
10. A Teaching Poem
11. A River Song
12. Sun Dance Poem
13. A Music of the Eighth House

Cat#

FTS009

Artist

Ursula K. Le Guin & Todd Barton

Title

Music and Poetry of The Kesh

Genre

Ambient / Spoken Word / Interplanetary Folk Music

Release date

March 23, 2018

Formats

LP / Digital
Vinyl Is Not Returnable

Box Lot

LP—50 Outer / 25 Inner

UPC

LP— 603786278818



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