

The Benevolence of Trees EP

Hand and Heart Music (#2026)



1. The Benevolence of Trees

words & music by Anne Hills, Musical arrangement by Al Power
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*I began this song before I lost my longtime mentor, wasband and friend, **Jan Burda**. He taught me how to play guitar, banjo and introduced me to American roots music. We sang songs about history, the struggle for justice and equality, and songs within the folk tradition by writers for whom he built guitars. He taught others how to play guitar, banjo and fiddle; and we founded a folklore center with Joan and Tyler Wilson in the early 1970s (Hogeye Music on the north side of Chicago). After he was gone, I began to understand more deeply how much he had taught me about trees. In Jan's last few years he put his land in conservancy, the old growth forest that grew the walnut tree he used to build the guitar I've played for years. Forests are being lost as I write this, and can only be replaced with time and protection. As we watch trees dying around us, any who are not alarmed should be.*

The pencil that I write with
and the page I write upon
the rafters that we sit beneath
so dense and straight and strong
Mimosa flowers, oranges
and so much more than these
all of them reflecting the benevolence of trees

our birch canoes crossed rivers,
wooden ships the oceans, wide
four walls, a roof, a steady fire
when winds blew cold outside
Maple sugar, amber, feathered nest
and honey bees
each of them depend on the benevolence of trees

A tisket, a tasket a woven willow basket
from cradle to the casket, wooden table, spoon and bowl
the acorn grows into an oak, there is no need to ask it
and even in it's falling nurtures earth and air and soul

this sweet guitar, from walnut tree, in Michigan ravine
it's cedar top recalls the scent of needles sharply green
where acorn fell and deer have tread
the luthier now sees
the music that is made with the benevolence of trees

the very air we breathe, is taken
given back again
made sweeter by the kind exchange
of root and leaf and stem
I walk the forest reverent
branches whisper in the breeze
and bow my head in thanks for the benevolence of trees

Anne Hills: voice
Megan Gould: violin
Olivia Moaddel: Violin
Elizabeth Handman: viola
Garó Yellin: cello
Scott Petito: guitar

2. Here Comes Love

words & music by Anne Hills
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*A more traditional folk-protest song, this is my reaction to what happened with the ICE invasion and murders in Minneapolis last winter, and written to honor the work of **Singing Resistance Twin Cities**, a viral grassroots choral and direct-action movement in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Formed in January 2026, thousands of participants use collective singing and walking vigils to nonviolently protest ICE activity and advocate for community care. The ICE violence and attacks on our neighbors (including citizens and legal residents) is spreading across our country as we all face their inhumane practices and the privately owned detention centers our government is using to imprison people whose only crime is wanting to earn the "American Dream," daring to believe it still exists.*

Nothing is as cruel as ice in winter
Cold and careless full of spite
Raining down through bitter night
Sharp enough to kill and break and splinter

Hard the heart that brings the children sorrow
Numb and callous, full of hate
Justify retaliate
Hell be damned, no thought about tomorrow

But here comes love
Arm in arm and singing
Here comes love
See the life its bringing
Here comes love, Here comes love

Slow the mind with blinded angry vision
Lashing out with word and deed
Violent and full of need
Quick to blame, and flaming hot derision CHORUS

Nothing is as slick as Ice retreating
Dangerous and darkly wet
Hiding, hoping you'll forget
obfuscating, telling lies and cheating CHORUS

On we march for short the hour of leisure
Seasons turning history long
Nothing changes with a song
Progress moves too slow for man can measure

But here comes love
Here comes love, Here comes love

Anne Hills: voice & guitar
Scott Petito: bass & percussion



3. January Drought

words by Anne Hills, music by Al Power

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Those who are familiar with my writing might notice that I love to work within structures, likely from so many years of songwriting. I challenge myself every year to write a sonnet to the old year leaving or the new year arriving (sometimes both). Because I also love collaborations, a number of these have been set to music by my fellow musicians: Jay Ansill, Peter Erskine and now Al Power. On and off during my younger years, I worked with classical art songs. Al's setting shares their qualities. Sonnets, like any word work, go their own surprising way ... the personal can be political.

It's winter and the ground is dead and dry
no snow or slush to comfort barren sand
nor hopeful clouds convening in the sky
nor icy quilt to hide this pointless land.
So, fields lie helpless, ugly, under gray.
Horizons turn, embarrassed by the sight
the golden sunsets fallen far away
and constellations steely in the night.
Once you and I were green, and golden, too
with harvests yet to laughingly collect
we drank the humid summer wind that blew
but stumbled from abundance to neglect.

This drought has lasted far too long, I fear
there will be less to celebrate this year.

Anne Hills: voice

Al Power: piano