



'When the Mountain Calls'

World premiere film and concert provide portals to peace, happiness and magic

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"You don't have to be a hero to accomplish great things. You can just be an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals."

- Sir Edmund Hillary

Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first humans to reach the top of Mount Everest in 1953.

Dr. Tom Vendetti would probably consider himself a pretty ordinary chap, who has been inspired to attain some remarkable accomplishments. These include creating a series of documentaries capturing the essence of a number of exotic mountainous lands, all the while administrating mental health services on Maui.

Long feeling drawn to the mysterious vastness of the Himalayas, in 1987 he first journeyed to Nepal and found himself on a rickety commuter plane chatting to a local Nepalese man. The man happened to be the famous sherpa Tenzing Norgay.

Norgay subsequently invited him to a Mount Everest anniversary party with Sir Edmund Hillary.

And thus begins Vendetti's latest cinematic adventure, "When the Mountain Calls: Nepal, Tibet & Bhutan," which chronicles this director/producer's profound experiences and insights from more than 30 years of traveling through the Himalayas.

Premiering Saturday, Nov. 5 on a program also featuring a live concert, the new doc draws from three previous projects by the Maui filmmaker: "Journey Inside Tibet," "Mount Kailash: Return to Tibet" and the most recent, Emmy-winning "Bhutan: Taking the Middle Path to Happiness."

Besides regaling us with the majesty and wonder of these remote lands, Vendetti's films open a window into third world cultures where the sacred dominates daily life, and a sense of joy and happiness prevail in even impoverished conditions.

"For me it's the Buddhist culture, the music and, of course, the scenery," says Vendetti of the lure of traveling to the Himalayas. "It's truly enlightening for me to go back and be there. The people certainly don't have a lot of material things, but they seem fairly happy and contented with life, and that's something I feel a lot of us lack here in Western culture. They exude this happiness."

While serving as clinical director of a mental health agency in Arizona, Vendetti's first film project, "Therapy on the River," chronicled the therapeutic journey in 1986 of a group of mentally ill patients on a trip down Utah's San Juan River. A year later he made his first journey to the Himalayas, when he met Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

The fortunate encounter with the famous mountaineers would be just the first of many remarkable coincidences and synchronistic events where the filmmaker would arrive just in the right place at the right time, and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

"I've sensed that there's something else going on here that's bigger than me," he says. "I'm just following my heart. I kind of innocently in a way, even naively, fell into these different situations. In that part of the world if you go in with a plan it's truly a setup for failure. You just have to let the story unfold; you just have to show up. You really don't have to know everything; you can just surrender and be open."

"As a psychologist I've been geared to looking at everything objectively, and especially working in my field with the seriously mentally ill, I've always been in the place of trying to ground people from psychosis and delusional thinking. On my last trip I just surrendered. It was really freeing."

During his first trip to the mountains he had a vision of Paul Horn playing flute in Tibet's revered Portola Palace, the former home of the Dalai Lama.

A decade later he realized that dream when he traveled to Tibet with the famous flutist and Tibetan Buddhist teacher Lama Tenzin, and filmed inside Lhasa's Potala Palace. This quest was captured in Vendetti's documentary "Journey inside Tibet."

"You can have some of the greatest images in the world, but music really brings it all to life," he notes. "When I heard Paul Horn's 'Inside the Taj Mahal' the first time, I became an instant fan, and I have been following his music ever since."

Traveling with Vendetti, Paul Horn became the first western musician to ever record in the majestic palace. The musician and filmmaker have subsequently collaborated on a number of projects including "When The Mountain Calls: Nepal, Tibet & Bhutan."

"I've had some wonderful adventures because of Tom and his vision and his love for the area," Horn reports. "The whole thing for me has always been a fantasy that now I can see has become a reality. It all began with Tom, and it's been wonderful. There were places in the world I always wanted to visit, and I had wonderful experiences and it turned out just that way."

Horn's association with the Indian subcontinent began back in the mid-1960s when he met Ravi Shankar in Los Angeles and was invited to play on the Indian sitar master's album "Portrait of a Genius."

Initiated into Transcendental Meditation, Horn studied with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and became one of the first TM teachers in the U.S. Returning to the ashram in 1968 to make a film of the TM founder, Horn arrived in the midst of the Beatles' famous pilgrimage to India.

During this sojourn, Horn traveled to the Taj Mahal. Amazed by the exquisite acoustics of the monument, he recorded some serene flute improvisations within its walls late one night.

Though he had not even intended to commercially release the

recording, "Inside the Taj Mahal" became a landmark, groundbreaking album - one of the most influential in establishing the meditative field of New Age music.

"It created a ripple that kept building, and it was a surprise to everyone, and myself, that the record took off," Horn notes. "Many say it opened up New Age music. It was a phenomenon, and it changed me, too, because when they booked me for concerts, it was my 14th album, but nobody knew about the other 13. My music got quieter. I couldn't play clubs anymore when I got back to L.A. It was just too heavy a vibe."

The dramatic shift in his career path to playing music that fostered peace and harmony had been prophesized some years earlier during a psychic reading.

"Years before I met the Maharishi and went to India, I had a reading from a woman in Los Angeles who went into a trance," he explains. "She didn't even know I was a musician, and she said, 'There's a new music coming and you will be one of those to bring it, because the vibrations are too heavy on the planet and the lower chakras are being too stimulated by music. The higher areas are not being activated and new, quieter forms of music will do it.'"

Long before Horn began playing the style of contemplative solo flute music associated with him, this acclaimed artist had pursued a successful career in jazz. Touring first with the Chico Hamilton Quintet in the mid-1950s, Horn later worked as a L.A. studio musician recording with such luminaries as Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole and Quincy Jones. And he earned two Grammy Awards for his album "Jazz Suite on Mass Texts."

During this time, hanging out with jazz legend Miles Davis, Horn first learned about using space between notes.

"He liked to hang out with me," Horn recalls. "We'd go and hear groups in town and after a set or so we'd leave and I'd say, 'What do you think?' And he'd say, 'Too many notes.' That's all he'd say. They were great players, but they were showing off. Miles' whole thing was the right note at the right place at the right time. It changed my whole way of looking at everything."

"When The Mountain Calls: Nepal, Tibet & Bhutan" features Horn describing his experiences recording in the Taj Mahal and later inside Egypt's Great Pyramid and in China.

With a prologue and epilogue by Kris Kristofferson, the new doc features narration by Horn's wife, Ann Mortifee, script by Maui Scene Editor Rick Chatenever and interviews with the Dalai Lama, the Prime Minister of Bhutan and the head of Greenpeace China.

The film will have its world premiere in Castle Theater at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center on Saturday, Nov. 5. The screening will follow a live concert by Horn and Mortifee, who will read from her new, inspirational book, "In Love with the Mystery."

Illustrated with exquisite nature photos, "In Love with the Mystery" contains a profound collection of pearls of wisdom that came to Mortifee in meditation.

"It was a gift," she explains. "I would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning for a year and meditate and listen deeply and see what spontaneously came. As Paul knows in playing music, we're just vessels."

"Ann and Paul's performance is a wonderful complement and companion piece to 'When the Mountain Calls,'" adds Vendetti. "Both deal with the mystery and wonders of life, and ultimately are a celebration of the human spirit."

As to how his new film will impact audiences, Vendetti hopes they will feel inspired.

"As a psychologist I've always been interested in the whole concept of happiness, so I hope it brings some insight into that," he concludes. "And by happiness I mean feeling contentment and satisfied within. "I spent a lot of time getting a PhD, but truly my education has been traveling, and particularly in that part of the world. It's opened me up to so many different ways of viewing life.

"When you get up in those mountains and are around those people, for me it's a spiritual event. The theme of this film is when the mountain calls, but I think the mountain can be anything for anyone."