

Circle of Life presents  
**WE THE PLANET**  
2004 FESTIVAL

November 13, 2004 • Oakland, California

## FESTIVAL REPORT

### BACKGROUND

Circle of Life created We the Planet in 2003 to model creative and exciting solutions to the world's most pressing environmental and social problems. We the Planet was designed to bring together a diversity of people, groups, ideas and tools to show that consciousness is cool.

The first We the Planet Festival was held in April 2003 in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. This event hosted over 10,000 people and was the most environmentally-conscious outdoor event ever produced. Since then, over 50 event producers and organizations have used Circle of Life's "Greening Events" model in their own outdoor productions.

In 2004, Circle of Life chose to bring these issues to a diverse urban audience in Oakland, California. Because environmental concerns disproportionately affect lower income and communities of color, we made it a top priority to create an event that was relevant and accessible to those communities.

We took a major financial and programmatic risk, as we reached out to an entirely new group of people with our message about environmental and sustainable solutions and the interconnection of all life.

Our evaluation of what worked and what didn't follows below. We offer it as a resource to other groups and producers as they plan their own events; and we hope our experience is widely useful.

### GOALS

The goals of the 2004 Festival were to:

- 1) Bring the often-overlooked community of Oakland together in a celebratory, new and powerful way.
- 2) Produce the most environmentally friendly indoor

event ever held on a large scale.

- 3) Broaden the programmatic scope of the We the Planet Festival to include hands-on workshops and more meaningful interactions between nonprofits and participants.

- 4) Enlist a diverse lineup of celebrities, musicians and speakers to bring in an audience that wouldn't normally participate in an activism event.

- 5) Connect urban communities with environmentalism and connect environmentalists with social justice issues in order to build community among groups, their constituents and supporters.

- 6) Provide specific and immediate opportunities for people to get involved with local nonprofits and causes.

- 7) Bring grassroots issues to mainstream audiences in a user-friendly, professional and accessible way.

- 8) Create a mission-driven event that breaks even financially.

To reach our goals, we implemented many strategies and program components, highlighted in this report.

### EVENT COMPONENTS

Below is information on the many programmatic components that went into designing and producing We the Planet.

One of the key elements of any event is a top-notch producer who resonates with the mission of the organization and the overall goals of the event. For the past two years, we have been fortunate to work with Sarah Haynes and the Spitfire Agency, the leading producer of large-scale environmentally-friendly events. To ensure the highest level of professional event production, virtually every component of the event relied on the Spitfire Agency's expertise and management in some way.



We designed and implemented each production and program element with the utmost attention to environmental and social concerns. The areas we address in this section include:

- Performers & Speakers
- Venue
- Nonprofits
- Vendors
- Food & Water Vending
- Zero Waste Efforts
- Power
- Artwork
- "Pushing the Boundaries for a New World"  
Daytime Workshops
- Paper & Printing
- Ticketing
- Promotions & Media
- Hotels & Travel

## Performers & Speakers

*"We were particularly pleased by the diversity of groups represented and the number of young people who came out for the event. It was an incredible coming together of communities, organizations and people of all ages."* –Michelle Shocked

To attract a diverse audience, we focused on bringing an eclectic mix of music styles to the Festival. With the help of Uma Productions, we enlisted the award-winning hip-hop band The Roots to perform as our headliner. Once The Roots came on board, we added Grammy™-winning rock stars Third Eye Blind; bluegrass and folk legend Michelle Shocked; a creative ensemble of Mickey Hart, Joan Baez and Friends; and Oakland-based hip hop favorites The Coup. This lineup was put together to attract a crowd of all ages and all racial, class and ethnic backgrounds.

Woody Harrelson and Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers joined the lineup, participated onstage and gave interviews for our "Greening Events" documentary project.

The show was co-hosted by Julia Butterfly Hill and Bay Area-based performance artist Aya de León. Speakers included local activists Jakada Imani and

Dereca Blackmon who talked about grassroots organizing in the community of Oakland. Also, Patrick Michael Harris spoke on recycling and Composting in Oakland.

## Venue

*"Perhaps one of the best features of We the Planet is its location this year. San Francisco's East Bay is a hotbed of progressive organizations and Circle of Life's decision to hold major events in the region shows that the flash of stuffy elite locations is not as important as catering to the needs and aspirations of those of us who work in this region."*

–Jason Venetoulis, Redefining Progress

We chose to produce our event in Oakland for several reasons. First, we were committed to bringing attention and visibility to a community that is often overlooked by the "environmental events" scene. We chose Oakland because of its diversity of nonprofit groups and the issues they work on.



*Michelle Shocked & The Waybacks  
Photo by Greg Habiby*

The venue, Henry J. Kaiser Center, was selected because it is one block from the BART public transportation system, it is a union building, and it has great potential for a show of about 5,000-7,000 people. It is also vastly underutilized because of its awkward size—too big for an intimate concert and too small for a stadium concert—and because of the union and building expenses associated with it. By bringing our event to this venue,

we hoped to stimulate other local producers to bring their events to Oakland as well.

We received support from the City of Oakland. Mayor Jerry Brown and Samee Roberts, the Marketing Manager for the City of Oakland, helped us secure enough city funding to underwrite 75% of the building rental and parking costs.

The City, in turn, was able to use We the Planet to promote the expansion of its curbside recycling program. Alameda County Waste Management helped us with on-site composting and recycling efforts (see "Waste Recovery" below).

We are proud of our partnership with the City of Oakland and believe that local government involvement is key to a successful event.

## Nonprofits

*"We the Planet was a great opportunity to interact with dozens of people newly renewed in their commitment to make progressive social change. We were particularly impressed by the diversity of groups represented and the number of young people who came out for the show."* –Nathan Henderson-James, ACORN (Assn. of Community Organizations for Reform Now)

*"I am proud to say that over the course of the evening, we collected nearly 400 public comments on our issue, many more than we had anticipated."* –Beth Gunston, California League of Conservation Voters

*"We were able to distribute thousands of individual pieces of literature, including more than 500 DVDs promoting kindness to animals and hundreds of Vegetarian Starter Kits (with those delicious recipes), and we spoke and showed videos to many more. I was very pleased to see such a huge effort by so many to keep the event as "Green" as possible. All vegan food is a huge plus."* – Caleb Wheeldon, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

*"All too often we fall into a trap of working so determinedly on our particular issue that we forget to look around and realize we could be working synergistically with other groups with similar goals. This event made us look around and like what we see."* –Karla James, Copwatch

*"We were particularly impressed with the diversity of people and groups represented at the Festival."* –Abby Trollinger, Global Exchange

We provided free or low-cost on-site vending space for 40 nonprofit organizations, giving preference to Oakland-based groups. We ensured that a diversity of issues were represented at the event. Participants commented that they were not previously aware of the importance of certain issues, but after talking with nonprofit representatives, they saw how they could get involved in a new issue or how they could collaborate. Social justice-focused groups became

intimately acquainted with how easy it is to recycle or compost and just how tasty vegan food can be! Environmental groups gained a deeper appreciation of how racial, economic and spiritual issues connect to their ongoing work.

What struck many participants was the sense of common cause among the nonprofits. Despite the fact that so many different campaigns and issues were represented, nonprofit partners said they felt like everyone was there to support one another and to forge new alliances toward the creation of a more joyful, just, and sustainable world.

We worked with each nonprofit to ensure they designed their outreach booth with maximum attention on interactions and to de-emphasize just handing out flyers and brochures. Several

groups went the extra mile to make their tables engaging: Art in Action offered on-the-spot lessons in dance and self-expression, International Solidarity Movement gave first-hand accounts of their efforts to foster peace between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, and Redefining Progress set up computer stations where attendees used an "ecological footprint" calculator to assess the environmental impact of their daily lifestyle choices. We required nonprofits to use recycled content paper for their handout materials and did not allow distribution of any plastic or other disposable promotional items.

## Vendors

*"We the Planet helped us generate increased consumer awareness and was so much fun for everyone. It was a blast for me, I was on cloud nine the whole time."* –Zhenya Muzyka, Zhenya's Gypsy Tea

We hand-selected business vendors after a screening process to ensure their products and services met our environmental, social and business sustainability standards. Each vendor sold products that were made from sweatshop-free, organic, or other conscious materials. We even turned away several vendors who would have easily met the standards for most other environmentally-conscious events, but whose business practices were not a fit with our values.



*Networking with Nonprofits  
Photo by Steve Brown*

## Food & Water Vending

*"My Brazilian sister-in-law has now decided to go vegetarian after reading all the material we had on site!" –Ali McKleroy, attendee*



*Zhena's Gypsy Tea  
Photo by Greg Habiby*

We enlisted two entirely vegan food vendors- Tante's (serving mostly organic food) and Lydia's (whose food is entirely organic). Both vendors used biodegradable foodware (utensils, plates, cups, napkins) to serve their food. Almost no trash was created in the food vending operations. This contrasts with typical concerts or events, where food vending is the most wasteful aspect of the production.

In lieu of selling disposable water bottles, we used Kleen Kanteen's water filtration system, which dispensed reverse-osmosis water for free to participants. Participants either brought their own water container, purchased a stainless steel water container and filled it with water, or purchased a reusable sports bottle made from recycled plastic milk bottles for the same price as a standard disposable bottle of water.

We created extensive zero-waste signage to educate participants about water bottle waste and disposable foodware waste, as well as about what the We the Planet solutions accomplish.

## Zero Waste Efforts

*"I wanted to share my appreciation to We the Planet for introducing me to what a zero waste music festival would look like. We the Planet has raised the standard for future festivals and displayed what can be achieved when we set our goals high."*

–Eric Bissinger, California Integrated Waste Management Board

We set an ambitious goal of creating a zero-waste event. This means we provided minimal trash can space and worked up front with all vendors and non-profits to ensure they brought only compostable or recyclable handout materials with them. At the end of the day, 98% of trash was diverted into composting and recycling. In comparison, we achieved 70% diversion at our 2003 Festival; and most indoor eco-events on this scale are able to achieve 70-80% with a lot of attention and focus on composting and recycling efforts.

Each waste recovery station was made up of one 64 gallon compost cart, one 64 gallon recycling cart, and one small, 3 gallon desk-sized trash bin sitting on top of a sealed-shut standard 32 gallon trash can. Signage showed what types of materials could go in each bin. Each station was artistically designed and signs were made from reclaimed materials.

We staffed stations with volunteers in order to ensure participants put their waste in the proper bins. We placed five stations around the venue and one station at Laney College during the "Pushing the Boundaries" workshop series during the day.

At the conclusion of the event, we were able to divert 98% of the waste that would have gone into the trash into recycling and composting. This year, we generated a total of just 20 pounds of trash; and 48 pounds of recycling. We also generated 960 pounds of compost. Because we also worked to keep our recycling needs low by not using plastic water bottles, recyclable bottles and cans in

favor of reusable, durable bottles for water vending), our recycling collection was minimal.

Cybrena Everett of Sustainable Life, the consultant who managed our waste recovery efforts, analyzed the trash at the end of the concert to assess how we could have reduced trash even more. She found the trash was comprised of:



*Patrick Michael Harris of the City of Oakland  
Photo by Greg Habiby*

- blue tape which was the only material the venue allowed vendors to use for hanging signs,
- wine corks and bottle tops to glass bottles used in dressing rooms and backstage,
- rubber bands from flowers,
- assorted random plastic bags,
- plastic lids from the tea vending booth, and
- sterno lights from the warming trays used for catering.



*Waste Recovery Station  
Photo by Cybrena Everett*

We learned that the plastic lids could have been avoided had we allocated a reliable volunteer to do an audit of all vending booths during the show. The other items were unfortunately unavoidable. Nonetheless, we accomplished an incredible feat by having thousands of people only generate enough trash to match roughly what a family of four produces at home in three weeks.

## **Power**

*"This event is an example of how we can gather, use electricity, eat food and function within the system without feeding the monster that consumes us all. We can support each other to make choices that are a sustainable way to live."* –Lydia Kindheart, Lydia's Lovin Foods

We powered the stage, sound and stage lights with two Caterpillar generators fueled with a donation of 150 gallons of biodiesel fuel from Agri-fuels in San Luis Obispo and Beauty Fuels in Santa Cruz. The venue had standard, on-the-grid electricity, so these generators were not necessary. However, they served a dual purpose: providing cleaner power from sustainable sources and educating participants about solution-fuels and viable alternatives to on-the-grid power. We also used Greenpeace's Rolling Sunlight Solar Truck to power stage art, which included the giant spinning globe and glowing stars. The truck was parked on the main street close to the front entrance so that solar energy was not just used but was also visibly promoted.

Because the event was indoors, we were unable to power the show entirely off the grid. For example, the stairwell and hallway lights are wired into the building, which is in turn hardwired into the regional electrical grid. However, all power used for stage lighting—as well as pre-production travel and computer use—was offset through *NativeEnergy's* donation of wind energy from their wind farm on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. In total, we offset almost 46 tons (almost 92,000 pounds) of CO2 pollution. That's about the same as taking the average car off the road for 7.5 years, or not driving for about 90,000 miles.

The Global Cooling Collective managed a booth on site where participants could offset the carbons created from their own travel to and from the concert by purchasing trees. They sold 500 trees to be planted in Ethiopia. These trees will offset approximately 25,000 pounds of carbon emissions each year resulting from burning fossil fuels.

Lastly, for educational purposes, we secured a bike-powered smoothie blender which was strategically placed by the main entrance food area. This bike blender reminded attendees that although solar and



*The Roots using bio-diesel powered sound and backed by lights offset by wind energy  
Photo by Greg Habiby*

biodiesel are great solutions, the least wasteful solution of all is good old-fashioned human power! We also further emphasized bike power by providing free secure bike parking on site to encourage attendees to ride their bikes to the event.

## Artwork

*"Thank you for inviting my sculpture (and me) to be a guest at We the Planet. It was a truly amazing event, inspiring and spiritually powerful. It was also diverse, a real meeting point, a town square gathering of different communities." - D'Andre Teeter, sculptor of "Untethered"*

We curated a wide array of political, sustainable art made from recycled and reclaimed materials, displayed on site. The artwork included work from ten artists plus a ten foot tall rotating Earth. The art was



*GMO Artwork - one of the many pieces of recycled and reclaimed artwork on site.  
Photo by Brie Matthews*

chosen because of each artist's inclusion of social, political, and environmental content and materials.

Artwork included:

- multiple pieces of metal and hand blown glass sculpture which lit up through integrated solar panels;
- sculptures created from recycled plastic and glass elements illustrating creative reuse of resources;
- sculptures made from guns that had been melted into a new form, breaking the cycle of violence one piece at a time and providing information on turning in weapons;
- handmade "Saris for World Peace", created by students at an elementary school in Belgium, dyed and decorated with words and images calling for world peace;
- a metal sculpture depicting the earth breaking free of the chains of racism, hate, and greed;
- an art display dramatizing GMO agriculture.

All artists donated their time and entrusted their creative, evocative pieces to our care for the concert.

## "Pushing the Boundaries for a New World"

*"I had a blast doing our presentation and workshop. Attendance was excellent and we received a lot of really good feedback. I was very pleased that there were as many young people of color in attendance as there were." -Rachel Jackson, Ruckus Society*

We wanted to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction around a variety of activism-oriented topics. So we created a series of daytime workshops, "Pushing the Boundaries for a New World," which highlighted new, creative and "revolutionary" approaches to old problems and issues. Our goal was to spark excitement in the audience so that participants would leave with new ways of thinking and acting and new opportunities to get involved in the world.

Workshops were designed to be highly interactive. Presenters gave short overviews of their work, then groups broke out into smaller hands-on workshop sessions. Each hour-and-a-half workshop had 100-250 people in attendance. Workshops were free with a concert ticket and were held directly across the street from the Henry J. Kaiser Center.

The following topics were covered by frontline activists representing a wide range of nonprofits:

### Music, Arts & Activism: The Power of Creativity in Action

Hope for a better future has returned with a vengeance to the arts and music scene. Participants



*Art and Activism mix.  
Photo by Greg Habiby*

learned how to express themselves with creativity and flair and even got personalized dance lessons!

- Michelle Shocked, singer, songwriter, and founder of independent label Mighty Sound
- Alli Chagi-Starr, founder of Dancers Without Borders and Cultural Links
- Jason Mateo, Educational Outreach Director of Youth Speaks
- David Willardson, Illustrator and Painter

### **Indy Media: Confronting Big Media**

Talented journalists, editors, and independent music reps offered their take on how people can break down the barriers posed by major media and get their stories covered in their local communities.

- Pratap Chatterjee, host of KPFA's Terra Verde and Director of CorpWatch
- Jakada Imani, Freedom Fighter Records and National Program Director, Ella Baker Center
- Andi Zeisler, Editorial/Creative Director of Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture

### **Beyond Voting: Reclaiming Democracy and Building Social Movements**

Attendees learned from leading community organizers who are putting people back into politics and creating an agenda of hope from the ground up. Participants even developed their own campaigns and strategized about the most effective ways to build strong coalitions for social change.

- Tony Coleman, Mindzeye Collective and rep. at the National Hip Hop Political Convention
- Amira Diamond, West Coast Director of Democracy Matters
- Nathan Henderson-James, ACORN and Project Vote

### **Direct Action & Civil Disobedience: Effective Strategies for Social Change**

Today's top activist pioneers shared their insights on the promise and pitfalls of directly taking a stand for change. Participants engaged in deep exploration of the fears that keep us from understanding and trusting one another as we work for a more just and sustainable world.

- Julia Butterfly Hill, activist, author, and Founder of Circle of Life
- Nancy Mancias, activist with CODEPINK Women for Peace
- Rachel Jackson, Program Director of The Ruckus Society

## ***Paper & Printing***

Living Tree Paper supplied tree-free paper for all of our printing needs, including hemp/flax paper for our tickets and post-consumer-waste paper for posters, flyers, program guides, laminates and event signage.

We also provided samples of Living Tree Paper to any nonprofit group that wanted it for their on-site hand-out materials.

We did not use any paper made from virgin trees—a very difficult task especially when making signage of odd sizes.



Most of our printing was done with soy-based inks at Inkworks Press, a local union print shop.

On site, we also used 100 percent post-consumer-waste paper towels and toilet paper. We created educational signage to inform participants about the positive environmental impacts of using earth-friendly household paper products.

## ***Ticketing***

We worked with InHouse Tickets, a local independently owned ticketing agency. InHouse is experienced at printing tickets with soy inks on tree-free papers, and they work closely with the Global Cooling Collective to plant trees around the world.

Tickets were also sold in small independent record stores and bookstores around the Bay Area for a \$1 service charge.

Tickets were priced at \$22 in advance, which we believed was a low price for the lineup we attracted (The Roots typically commands a \$30-\$35 ticket price). We also gave away over 1,000 tickets to low income residents, local high school students, and Oakland-based nonprofit agencies.

## ***Promotions and Media***

*"I was especially impressed with the organizer team's ability to draw a much more diverse crowd than usual at "green" events. Remarkable how local government, hip hop bands and fans and activists shared stage and venue, working towards a common goal."* –Stefanie Prugel, attendee

We approached promotions with a multi-pronged strategy which included:

- print advertising
- radio advertising
- street promotions
- web promotions
- print and online listings

We secured an advertising sponsorship from the SF Bay Guardian, who ran four weekly ads.

Because our lineup was not considered commercial enough for most stations, our radio promotions depended almost entirely on independent and college radio. KPFA and Hard Knock Radio provided the bulk of our radio promotions for the entire month leading up to the event. We also provided ticket giveaways on KALX (UC Berkeley's radio station), KUSF (USF's radio station), KPOO, and Power 92.7. We had a few PSAs run on commercial stations Live 105 and Alice 97.3. But we were unable to obtain free promotional spots on stations like KMEL or KFOG because the lineup did not have featured artists on their regular playlists.

Our street promotions were primarily volunteer-run. We hired a volunteer coordinator who tracked where posters and flyers were being distributed and hung, and handled communications with our outreach volunteers. Because many volunteers proved unreliable, and because "covering" a neighborhood meant different things to different people, during the last 10 days prior to the show, we decided to augment our volunteer efforts with paid poster hangers. The paid poster hangers were the most successful aspect of the street promotion effort, and in the future, we will rely on paid poster hangers to ensure our message is promoted properly on the street.

Several people were responsible for web postings, and as a result, the outcome was less organized than we would have liked. We had listings on key sites like AOL Digital City, SF Gate and CitySearch. We also were featured in SF Diversions, and in email blasts from our 40 nonprofit partners.

Our media coverage was handled by veteran music publicist, Laura B. Cohen. She put out four press releases leading up to the show and secured several national online spots for We the Planet in Rolling Stone Online, Billboard Online, MTV.com, and many other national, high-visibility sites. The week before the event we had the cover story in the East Bay Express, a pick of the week in the SF Bay Guardian, and listings in other local papers.

## ***Hotels & Travel***

We selected the most environmentally friendly hotel in the East Bay, the Doubletree Berkeley Marina, to house our celebrity visitors. The Doubletree Berkeley Marina has the distinction of being the only Green-Certified Hotel in the area. Because many Bay Area hotels were on strike or experiencing union boycotts during this time, we identified those hotels and avoided them.

We also worked with Incredible Adventures, a local biodiesel limosine service, to bring musicians and celebrities from the airport to the hotel to the venue. We ensured that the environmental impact of the plane and car travel we incurred was offset through NativeEnergy's wind donation, detailed above.

## **CHALLENGES**

In order to be truly open about our work, and to provide maximum benefit to others, we offer this section on areas where we were challenged.

### ***A financial mandate to break even***

With our Festivals, breaking even has been a challenge. We were able to recoup most of our costs in 2003 via ticket sales and corporate support, but in 2004, we will require additional fundraising of approximately \$100,000 over and above ticket sales revenue to be able to produce the Festival at the high standards we set. We set a goal of creating a break-even event, but given the financial risks that we chose to take this year in order to produce the absolute best, most cutting-edge program possible we learned that our programmatic goals were more important than "breaking even."

That is, as a nonprofit organization that is mission-driven, we consciously decided that it was more important to us to ensure we create programmatic

miracles of the magnitude that we created in 2004 than it was to produce a break-even rock concert. Some of the program-driven financial risks we took this year were:

- hosting We the Planet in Oakland instead of San Francisco;
- using a union building;
- providing over 25% of tickets free to low income residents and youth;
- sparing no expense to ensure we produced the most environmentally friendly event we could;
- using vending space to bring in nonprofits rather than paid vendors;
- turning down corporate funding from companies that didn't meet our standards;
- creating an all-around rich educational experience for participants in every way possible.



*All the trash, compost & recycling generated at We the Planet fit into these bins. The green bins held composting. Photo by Cybrena Everett*

Future events will require a new set of financial and programmatic assumptions.

### **Venue/Location**

We chose an Oakland venue specifically because we wanted to bring our unique take on environmentalism and social justice to an audience that rarely sees these types of events in their community.

That was both a plus—because we brought something fertile and beautiful to this community—and a minus—because the Oakland community was not familiar enough with this type of event. As a result, we did not have the turnout we had hoped for. Our core San Francisco audience, who attended the 2003 We the Planet event in Golden Gate Park, is a different audience, and most of them did not attend this event because of its unfamiliar Oakland location and because it was an evening concert.

We were proud to work with the building's union, IATSE Local 107. However, this added over \$15,000 in costs that we would not have had in an outdoor, non-union venue.

### **Promotion**

Even though we had some great publicity/media pieces, we still struggled with radio and street promotions.

Last year our promotional strategy hinged on mainstream commercial Alice Radio, yielding a very white audience; this year we relied on KPFA for most of our radio visibility. While KPFA advertised around the clock, their listenership is smaller than that of a commercial radio station.

Our street promotions were difficult at best and we relied almost exclusively on volunteer efforts to hang posters and hand out flyers. It would have been more worthwhile to pay poster hangers from the beginning rather than paying a volunteer coordinator.

### **Communicating our eco-standards**

We had some challenges in working with vendors and nonprofits to ensure our high environmental standards were met. Many vendors that already thought they had an eco-friendly operation were somewhat taken aback when we went through their entire on-site presence strategy to make recommendations.

For example, we struggled with allowing the Doubletree Hotel to distribute their world-famous chocolate chip cookies on site at the concert, in VIP gift bags and during the workshops. The cookies are vegetarian but not vegan and not organic. They were wrapped in recycled content, recyclable wrappers. We wanted to accept the cookies because a) we knew the audience would love free cookies; b) the Doubletree was a major sponsor and we wanted them to have a good experience. However, we had to make a compromise and only hand out the cookies during the daytime workshops at Laney College. As we expected, the cookies were extremely popular and a grateful workshop crowd ate them within a couple hours.

## **LESSONS TO SHARE**

### **Working with Celebrities**

Now that Circle of Life has worked closely with celebrities for almost three years, we are able to offer some insight about the challenges and rewards of a celeb-driven strategy.

The rewards of working with celebrities are obvious—visibility, legitimacy, publicity. Yet in order to reap these rewards, it is imperative to have a top-notch publicist on board to maximize the celebrity draw. Also, a professional production is absolutely critical.

Celebrities have many considerations when confirming a benefit event: Is your cause one that is near and dear to them? Are you able to provide them reassurance that they will get professional treatment at your event? Do they want to lend their name to your cause, and if so, how will it impact their reputation? What paid opportunities are they missing by being at your show? How will their appearance at your event impact their future shows in your region?

All of these considerations make it very difficult to secure celebrity participation in a timeframe that is workable for promoting your show properly.

In our case in 2004, our headliner had a conflicting event that required that we move We the Planet's date in order to accommodate them. Two of the bands had gigs within the same local region within a month of our event, and Martin Luther of The Roots was billed to play in San Francisco late at night, the same night as our show.

### ***Working with Volunteers***

*"I am so lucky to be able to work with you, and I want to thank you from the deepest part of my heart for giving me the fantastic opportunity to work with Circle of Life. You have changed my life and given me such inspiration and drive to change the world." –Erinn Unger, Volunteer*

We the Planet is designed to rely heavily on volunteer help, from the outreach and promotions to the production on site to cleanup after the event. This year's volunteers were a mixed bag.

Some volunteers were reliable, hardworking and committed to the cause. Other volunteers had different agendas, like getting a free ticket and getting backstage. As a result, we had a lot of unreliable volunteers and no paid staff to replace them if they didn't show up or do their job. We learned that it is important to provide volunteer opportunities for the best



*Volunteer makes the difference.  
Photo by Caitlin Sweeney*

volunteers, but for the jobs that require a high level of responsibility, a paid person can be expected to do a much better job, even if they are paid a nominal, below market-rate amount for the work.

### ***Solution Power***

Attempting to power an indoor event off the grid is a very difficult undertaking in an old building. We used the solar truck and biodiesel generators in order to educate people, but those items are not always easy to find and do not necessarily power enough of the event to make them worthwhile from a cost standpoint.

Recently it has become hard to find a generator company that will allow biodiesel, because biodiesel, when fueling a generator that normally uses standard diesel, acts as a cleaning agent and can clog filters. The Caterpillar company is one of the only generator brands that still accepts biodiesel, and many of their distributors still need to be educated by the home office that high-quality biodiesel is acceptable.

We had to contact a number of companies before we found Peterson Power in San Leandro, CA, which rented generators to us.

Because of both the inconvenience and the cost of off-the-grid sources, we found that for indoor events, it is cheaper and easier to use the existing on-site power sources. However, in order to leave a "light footprint" it is absolutely critical to offset all of the "on the grid" energy used on site and in pre- and post-production by purchasing wind energy from a company like NativeEnergy.

With an outdoor event, where generators must be rented in any case, we strongly recommend a more comprehensive approach to energy which includes biodiesel generators, solar trucks, and wind energy or other carbon-offsetting programs.

## ***Reaching out to a Diverse Audience***

Unlike our first We the Planet Festival in Golden Gate Park, for which our audience was primarily white and San Francisco-based, this year we were more successful in attracting a racially diverse audience, a key goal. Producing the show in a more urban venue and changing our promotional strategy to reach out to more people of color yielded an audience that was extremely diverse not only by race but by age as well.

We'd like to share some of our activities that led to a more diverse audience. Many organizers have the best intentions of reaching out to a diverse community, and we applaud groups that understand the importance of a diverse audience for their work. Yet we see time and time again that traditional environmental conferences and events reach primarily white, privileged audiences. There are many barriers that ultimately keep these events from reaching their goals. We addressed some of these barriers head-on and made deliberate decisions about issues that affected the audience makeup including:

- venue location
- nonprofit outreach
- music and speaker lineup
- promotions design and placement
- ticket distribution strategy

We recommend that any group that wishes to create an event reaching a diverse audience take a hard look at these issues and consider how their decisions in each area will affect the audience makeup.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

### ***We the Planet Festivals***

We the Planet is the quintessential manifestation of Circle of Life's mission in action. It is a powerful showcase for the interconnection of all life and the political and environmental issues. Our Festivals are the leading model for other event producers to create environmentally friendly events; and with each new event, we raise the bar even higher on what is

possible.

We are in the planning stages for a third We the Planet Festival. However, our team will be taking a hard look at whether we can create the financial infrastructure necessary to meet our programmatic goals with future We the Planet Festivals.

### ***Tour via veggie oil bus***

In 2003, we produced a We the Planet tour for which we rented a biodiesel tourbus that was not up to professional standards. Because there is always high demand for Julia Butterfly Hill speaking around the country, and because a lease-able biodiesel/veggie oil powered tourbus does not exist, Circle of Life recently



*"Before" shot of the interior of our new tourbus!  
Photo by Brie Matthews*

purchased a top-of-the-line Prevost professional tour bus, which we are converting to run on vegetable oil and biodiesel power. We will refurbish the interior with sleeping bunks, a kitchen and sitting area all with reclaimed wood and eco friendly fabrics and other materials.

The bus is part of our strategy to continue bringing We the Planet-type events on the road. We hope to build large-scale events in other areas around the country. We will use the bus

starting in spring 2005 to visit colleges, universities, high schools and elementary schools all over the country, bringing the message "Consciousness is Cool" into classrooms, auditoriums, and to people driving on the road near us! The bus will serve functionally as a means to travel from place to place saving us both the cost and environmental impact of airplane travel. Most importantly, it is an educational tool and a billboard promoting solution fuels, creativity and consciousness.

The tourbus will cost over \$15,000 per year in direct hard costs to maintain and run. In 2004, we received an initial major donation to cover the cost of purchase, but we still need an additional \$10,000 to complete the refurbishing and conversion of the bus.

## ***Greening Events Guide***

After the 2003 We the Planet Festival, Circle of Life created its ***Greening Events Guide*** to provide source materials, ideas and considerations to anyone wanting to replicate our model for eco-friendly events. Since then, at least 75 guides have been distributed for free to groups as wide ranging as Harvard University, Lollapalooza, the Rolling Thunder Down-Home Democracy Tour, Sustainable South Bronx and Youth Speaks. We will continue to update the Guide as needed, and it is readily available to any group or producer wanting to use it in their work.

Additionally, we are producing a ***Greening Events Video*** using footage from both our We the Planet Festivals. The video will showcase the creative solutions we put into place at We the Planet. It will be distributed to event producers, schools, organizations and companies that want to see what an environmentally friendly event looks like and how they can replicate it.

## ***“Building Bridges” Summit for Nonprofit Groups***

Building on the powerful connections between nonprofit groups and individuals made at We the Planet 2004, Circle of Life is spearheading a summit for nonprofit groups in late Spring 2005. The Summit will bring together a wide range of organizations to look more deeply at the barriers that keep them from working more closely together and aligning themselves as one common movement instead of disparate environmental, social justice and peace movements. We will address issues like race and class and how those impact our work, so that environmentalists and environmental groups can learn more about how their work connects with poor communities and communities of color.

We are in the beginning planning stages for the Summit and have enlisted key nonprofit partners, Earth Island Institute, Global Exchange, California League of Conservation Voters and The Ruckus Society, to develop the Summit and begin the important work of building bridges between environmental and social justice movements.