A
lanta is home to an abundance of creative artists seeking to make a difference. Among them, Sue Schroeder, Angela Bennett and Viva Vuvuzela use the power of their artistry in dance, theater, and music, respectively, to kindle activism and to build engagement in issues relating to the health of the planet.

Dance For Connection
As co-founder of Core Dance, an Atlanta-based professional dance organization in its 39th season, Sue Schroeder has been on a mission to use dance as a catalyst for change for a long time.

Her current project, If: A Memoir, is a love song. It’s a vehicle for engagement in issues and to build engagement in issues relating to the health of the planet.

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“But your yin side is equally as important and equally powerful,” says Bennett. “Our creative, intuitive and holistic instincts help us revere our connections and see solutions outside of the box. Without our yin connection,” says Bennett, “we see the earth as a commodity to be used without a sense of reverence, sacredness or gratitude. Yet that is exactly what we need to heal.”

Bennett’s latest project, Guardians of Gaia, evokes three goddesses associated with three ancient indigenous cultures—Hawaiian, West African and Native American—to nurture connection and understanding between aspects of the natural world and ourselves.

“Indigenous cultures around the world enjoyed a deep connection with the earth. They considered it holy and to be revered,” says Bennett, “and we can learn from their example. So we went to great lengths to research and connect with the elders from these traditions to learn about their dance, music, rhythms and visions for these images to express themselves.”

Conceived, co-written, directed and produced by Bennett, Guardians of Gaia integrates sets, music, dance, video and other media to bring people into an experience of profound gratitude for and connection with the natural world.

Now Bennett is refashioning the show slightly to speak directly to an important emerging audience: middle-school kids.

“We started to see that kids are the ones who will light the fire and lead the way in healing our relationship with Mother Earth,” says Bennett. Among other tweaks to the production, young people will be able to take action through web-based prompts that earn them the title “Guardian of Gaia.”

For more information, visit RootsProductions.org.

Music for Activism
As a musician, Aviva Vuvuzela is an activist. And as an activist, she’s a musician.

“Music is a language,” she says. “It’s like planting a garden. You can plant any seed you want.”

For Aviva, lead singer of the band Aviva and the Flying Penguins, music has been a powerful vehicle to generate activism to legalize hemp for medicinal and practical purposes.

Her first album, Painted Truth, featured the song Cannabis Car, about a car that runs on hemp fuel. The album charted in the Top 100 New Releases on iTunes and won her Best Folk Artist of 2017 and Album of the Year recognition. She was also a finalist for the Songwriter’s Showcase at the CMAs and a quarterfinalist for the prestigious ASCAP Foundation PRO Composition Prize.

Aviva says about a lot of things, but her hemp activism has put her on the map. She’s performed songs to support the Standing Rock Sioux’s demonstrating to halt an oil pipeline across their land. She’s performed songs about the floods in Texas. Every week, she uploads new songs about current events on her YouTube channel.

Music is at the core of her activism.

“I don’t know if I could be an activist without my music. It drives me, it grounds me, and it would be too painful to do it any other way. I’m not an angry activist. I want to inspire people in a loving way.”

“This has been a fight worth fighting,” she continues, “and it just might be a fight that’s almost won. It’s been an amazing 20 years, and we’ve come a long way. Nowadays, you can visit hemp fields in Hawaii, Kentucky, Tennessee, Colorado, Michigan—and just eat it if you want. 2019 might be the year that Georgia legalizes hemp,” she continues. “I’ve been meeting with Georgia legislators at the state level, and we’re getting heard.”

For more information, visit AvivaAndTheFlyingPenguins.com

The cast of Guardians of Gaia

Local Artists Give the Earth a Voice
Environmental Activism Gets Creative

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The cast of Guardians of Gaia

Theater for Wisdom and Balance
When Angela Bennett was sitting on a theatrical set a few years ago, reading a book and waiting for her next scene, she realized she wanted—no, needed—to redefine the trajectory of her career.

Her acting livelihood had been going just fine, actually. Winner of numerous awards, including Actress of the Year, Best Actress in a Comedy, and Best Actress of the Year at Creative Loa

e Edition/Atlanta naAtlanta.com

For more information, visit

CoreDance.org

For more information, visit

RootsProductions.org.

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