I had the distinct pleasure of speaking with Steve Gordon about his record label, Sequoia Records, recently.

Please tell us about Sequoia Records and how it came to be.
About 30 years ago, after attending college and the Dick Grove Music Academy in Hollywood, my brother David and I worked as session players around Los Angeles, David on piano and me on guitar. We also liked to go backpacking in Sequoia National Park to unwind. On one of these trips, after one of our meditations, we noticed how much we appreciated the wildlife and nature sounds seemed to us. The birds, stream, and wind in the trees were almost like musicians playing a composition. We got inspired to record the nature sounds, bring them back to our studio, and compose music to go with them. We wanted to create music that would actually interact with these sounds, and in the process create a new kind of music that is a living thing, something that could help people connect with nature and achieve peace of mind.

The first albums were Misty Forest Morning and Peaceful Evening. Later, we released the huge healing classic, Garden of Serenity. At the time, there were not many places selling this type of music, so we took our albums to local bookstores. The business we created was called Sequoia Records, named after the forest we used to visit. Eventually, it grew into our full-time career. Today, Sequoia is the #1 New Age label featuring music for healing, relaxation, yoga, and movement from many popular artists from around the world. We call it Organic Earth Music.

Please tell us about the music you create.
For the first decade, we focused most of our creativity in the direction of ambient music with nature sounds. After our first “hit,” Garden of Serenity, we started to work with keyboards in ways that we never had before. We really took it to the next level. We continued to work in that way with Garden of Serenity II, and then Soothing Sanctuary.

Then we started to become interested in more rhythmic music. We had been camping in the mountains with groups of friends, and we’d bring drums to these gatherings, where we’d hold these all-night drumming sessions. We enjoyed that a lot, and after doing that for a number of years, we felt...
we had achieved a level of mastery with the drumming where we were ready to share it with our fans.

Our first rhythmic release was Sacred Earth Drums, and it turned out to be a real phenomenon. When it was released, we were not prepared for the response. For us, it was as if we'd discovered a universal groove. We took ancient shaman beats and melded them with Native flutes and a lot of effects we could do in the studio to make it sound expansive. We combined that with different keyboards and synthesizers, electric guitars and acoustic guitars, and we just created this whole soundscape.

We followed that with Sacred Spirit Drums and Drum Medicine, which charted in Billboard and won three major awards.

Last year we released Shaman's Vision Journey that blends ancient rhythms and flutes with crystal bowls for meditation and healing.

How do you choose the music you produce and artists you represent?
It has always been a very organic sort of growth. We had friends who created music or they would know someone who did. Once we became so successful selling our own music, it was natural for us to add other artists. This is how it happened with Gary Stadler (Fairy of the Woods, Fairy Lullabies), Sophia (Spirit Healing Chants) and Jaya Lakshmi. I have just finished producing her latest yoga-chant release called Sublime, and that is exactly how it sounds. Sublime would appeal to fans of Deva Premal and Prem. Then we started a partnership with a label in Europe in 2001 and that led to our sub-label Sequoia Groove. This gave us access to all of the finest electronica chill/lounge artists. The success of our chill/lounge collections such as the Buddha Lounge Series and Hotel Tura has really been amazing.

What do you see for the future of Sequoia and New Age music in general?
We are going through a transition in the music business, which is actually very exciting. There are now more people listening to New Age music than ever before. Most of the large, bigbox stores are not carrying much New Age music now because they have less space for CDs, so the small New Age stores have a big advantage in stocking this genre. In many cases, these small stores are the only places it is available, so the stores that stock these CDs are doing very well with them. This is creating a resurgence of music sales in New Age book and gift stores.

The future of New Age music is very bright. People are becoming more interested in lots of musical styles and New Age has become the place where many different forms of music come together; atmospheric, world, electronica, vocal, ethnic, Celtic, healing, etc. The music coming out now is better than ever, and we have lots of great releases planned for the coming year.

Earth Drum – The 25th Anniversary Collection, which features our favorite drumming songs plus a free DVD of gorgeous nature films; the new Jaya Lakshmi release, Sublime; Buddha Lounge 6 in April, and in the fall we will release Sound Peace – The 25th Anniversary Collection, Vol. 2 that will contain all of our favorite healing music tracks plus a free DVD of tranquil nature films. We will also release Celtic Lounge 3 this year, which has become a very popular series.

Interview by Sandi Liss. Sandi is the owner and founder of SoulJourney of Butler, NJ, New Jersey's longest continually operating metaphysical store. She holds her Master's Degree in Natural Healing and continues working toward her Ph.D. She earned her Level One Certification in Astrology from the NCGR (National Council of Geocosmic Research) and her Master/Teachership in Usul and Shamballa Reiki, and serves as Administrator for CDVR (Coalition of Visionary Resources). She is experienced in Solitary as well as Coven work and revels in various forms of divination as well as candle magick, frequently advising customers on spell creation. She resides in northern New Jersey with her two deaf Dalmatians.

Would you like to be considered for a future edition in this column? If so, please email your interest to editor@auramag.com.