

[Q&A]

## with Alex Shapiro



Just months before releasing her chamber-music collection *Notes from the Kelp* last fall, composer Alex Shapiro fled her longtime Malibu, Calif., home and nestled into the natural wonderland of Washington's San Juan Island. Here, she talks about her love for the ocean and newly lightened eco-footprint.

**Q:** What inspired you to become vegetarian?

**A:** In 1991, I scored a documentary for PETA, so I got an instant education about the appalling ways that animals are treated in this country. Six months later, I traveled through the Gobi Desert, where there are no gardens and no supermarkets and you're lucky to eat an unripe tomato. When I came back to America, I was so overwhelmed by all the food choices that I asked myself, "Why do you need to keep eating meat?" For me, vegetarianism is about heightened awareness of those choices, and of the living creatures around us.

**Q:** Has that awareness influenced your music?

**A:** Absolutely. About half my catalog is directly related to nature, and that includes animal life. So much of my creativity comes from the sea, in particular. If I weren't a musician, I'd be a marine biologist.

**Q:** How has living in a more tranquil environment changed your work?

**A:** You hear everything when you're in such a quiet place, whether it's the rustling of leaves or the movement of an insect. You feel so much more dialed in, which is the most magical thing for a composer.

—Elizabeth Barker

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