

CELESTIAL NAVIGATIONS
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Powered by the imaginations of veteran actor Geoffrey Lewis, and multi-award-winning composers Geoff Levin and Chris Many, Celestial Navigations is charting a course through the ancient art of storytelling, contemporary and traditional music and performance art. With the release of their third genre-bending album, *Ice: Chapter III (Nouveau)*, this critically acclaimed group continues to challenge the imagination and touch the hearts of their fans and followers through their unique symphonic stories.

The spark for this interactive partnership between drama and music originated when Levin, a songwriter and rock recording artist, first saw Lewis performing original monologues on stage. "I was completely mesmerized," says Levin. "There he was telling stories, completely alone on stage, just blowing people away." The interaction between storyteller and audience captured both Levin's attention and his imagination, and the idea of creating a vivid storytelling experience set to music was born.

Levin and Lewis developed a semi-regular partnership which endured through several versions of their ensemble, with as many as five members. In 1984, the two brought their stories to a six-week engagement at the Matrix Theatre in Los Angeles, which earned a great deal of critical praise, including a "Drama-Logue" award for Lewis.

Meanwhile, Lewis continued to build a successful film career, while Levin and his production partner Chris Many made a name for themselves in commercial and industrial film scoring. When Many joined Celestial Navigations in early 1985, a creative combination was born which immediately jelled. While developing a wide-ranging grassroots following through their live performances, the group recorded their debut album, *Celestial Navigations*, in 1987. This album sold impressive numbers through independent channels before securing major record label involvement. This debut effort charted as high as #12 on Billboard's "New Age" chart, while their follow-up, *Chapter II (Nouveau)*, (1989) cracked the Top-5. The group's following grew exponentially, as evidenced by the packed houses which characterize the live shows.

For Celestial Navigations, the audience becomes an interactive component of the group, as their imaginations and emotional reactions help create the stories. As Many notes: "A majority of people come to our shows or hear one of our albums not knowing what to expect, and then find things in the stories that relate very personally to their own lives on an intellectual, as well as emotional level."

For Lewis, one of the most rewarding parts of performing with the group is experiencing the audience's involvement. "It hits people in a very visceral way," he says. "They laugh, they cry, they gasp or get angry and shout things. I've even seen people in the audience mouthing some of the repeated portions of the stories along with me, like a song."

So how does Celestial Navigations manage to stir so many emotions? Their stories, which cover a wide range of topics and moods, are often hilarious and sometimes heartbreaking. Geoffrey Lewis develops these stories in a variety of ways, which include getting into a character and allowing him or her to speak until a complete story evolves and exploring personal areas of interest.

It is in this way that many of Lewis' memorable stories come about. "Intervention" on

the Ice album, for example, grew out of Lewis' burgeoning interest in the material arts. Levin explains, "That story is a great example of how Geoff Lewis' writing is an extension of his personal interests and point of view at any given moment."

In other instances, Lewis will sit down and write a story based on a single idea. The epic survival adventure, "Ice" for example, developed out of a request for a story about trust. "Horses," one of the group's most popular, poignant and emotionally gripping tales grew out of Lewis' effort to create a horror story.

Once the basic stories are formed, Levin and Many go to work to create musical settings which will capture and enhance all elements of the tale. The music of Celestial Navigations, which brings the words to captivating life, therefore encompasses an enormous range of styles and accents as the stories themselves.

Nowhere is Levin and Many's musical diversity more apparent than on their new album, Ice, which showcases the duo's talents on bluesy slide guitar, elegant jazz, heavy rhythm tracks, and even as a baroque classical orchestra. "War Babies" features a beautiful piano accompaniment by special guest Chick Corea which captures the nostalgic mood of the tale. In order to truly evoke the spontaneous emotional textures in the stories, Celestial Navigations record their material live.

Lewis, Levin and Many all agree that their symphonic stories cannot be pigeonholed into any single genre. Their concerts attract a wide cross-section of the public, from children and young adults to the elderly. All will confirm that Celestial Navigations must be experienced first hand and in-person to be understood. Chris Many explains the steady increase in the fan base of their grassroots appeal: "People who talk to their friends after seeing one of our shows will say things like 'I can't easily explain what they do -- it is unique, different and an art form all to itself -- but you have got to see or hear it for yourself.' I consider that a great compliment."

In order to demonstrate firsthand what Celestial Navigations is all about, the trio, which appeared regularly on a CBS network television variety series, has recorded their own video before a live audience, which will air in support of the new album. Levin notes that they chose to produce and distribute their show independently because "Celestial Navigations is so unusual that there is no existing television format that knows what to do with us. We believe that this video will be the most effective way for us to reach a mass audience."

But even with great chart numbers and record sales, the real reward for Lewis, Levin and Many is seeing an audience respond to their work, "If people come away from our show feeling uplifted or touched in some way," says Levin, "then we've done our job as storytellers." The trio believes that Ice, which runs the gamut from horror and adventure to romance and sexuality, will have a similar effect. Through it all, Celestial Navigations continues to expand its focus, constantly breaking down conventional barriers to invent a unique storytelling experience for all generations.