

When we begin creating a new piece, we're continuing a conversation. Later, the listener or the viewer extends it further. In this case, Frisell's conversation is with place, the elements of that place, with himself and music, and, onstage, with the other musicians in his band.

My Glen Deven walk back up was a lot slower than the going down; returning home always is. The day's heat was coming on, causing this walker to lollygag, to stare open-mouthed at resting moths and flitting butterflies, glad to be engrossed not by something on my screen but by the earth's somebodies.

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At the 2015 Monterey Jazz Festival, a new piece of music will premiere, one that's still being written. The young marvel, trumpeter, composer, and bandleader Ambrose Akinmusire spent ten days at Glen Deven this past April. He and I recently chatted about his time there and his music. The land began working quickly on him. Akinmusire said, "The first day I was getting used to it. By the second, I felt cleansed. I found I had to change the title of the piece I'd been commissioned to write to 'The Forgotten Place' because I felt I was getting back in touch with this place inside myself, solitude. It's a place we all have inside. Before I went there, I'd started writing but I had to trash all that."

In solitude, many of us are better able to receive what's coming forward creatively and otherwise. In nature, that solitude has a greater platform, a more secure landing place. It's easier to listen—simultaneously within and without—when we're not being predictably and unpredictably interrupted. Akinmusire noted another, important attribute of solitude in general and solitude in nature in particular: "Those days were a luxury. It's a place of privilege. I know so many people who will never get to experience this kind of beauty, like those in the community of Oakland where I grew up. I wondered what would it be like for them to be here. A lot of my ancestors never had that chance. What if they had?"

While at Glen Deven, Akinmusire kept a journal and took notes. He worked on the melody. During our conversation, his voice got quiet and a bit distant for a moment; I could almost hear him contemplating in that silence. "While there and since, I've thought a lot about what it took for my ancestors in order for me to have this experience."

His comment made me think of my time in nature in a new and important way, as privilege. Akinmusire added, "After ten days I felt like I'd been there for a month."

When I asked for details about his new composition, *The Forgotten Place*, he declined, saying, "I can't talk about it because I want to be open to it changing. But I can say my band is composed of ten musicians. We've got cello, which is woody, and Irish harp, that's like birds and it's angelic. I wanted nothing sharp or brassy, nothing harsh."

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Nature and art have a shared essence; they're both acts of creation—the human's creativity on a relatively small scale, the earth's on an unequivocally large one. The land and the sky and the sea are all makers, doers, and inventors of the first kind. For generations some have tried to deny and abolish our innate knowing of this link to the lineage of our nascent impetus to create. The further away from nature we get, the easier this may be to do. But what better teacher is there to remind us that for those inclined to do so, making art, and creating, is our birthright? At Glen Deven and in other protected enclaves, wild, asphalt-free places, even small parks within cities, the call of our inspired endeavors can become undeniable.

Did the air enter Frisell's guitar through its open mouth as it, and the sun and the sky, entered Frisell himself, so that his writing and playing were transformed? It sounds that way. Listening to the Big Sur Quintet, you can hear the wind lift off the Pacific and slip through the trees. And you might picture deer grazing as they hold their brown shoulders against that wind.

—This essay is an expanded adaptation from Patrice Vecchione's most recent book, *Step into Nature: Nurturing Imagination and Spirit in Everyday Life* (Beyond Words/Simon & Schuster, Atria Books, 2015).

Patrice Vecchione (patricevecchione.com) is the author of *Step into Nature: Nurturing Imagination and Spirit in Everyday Life* and *Writing and the Spiritual Life: Finding Your Voice by Looking Within*, as well as two collections of poetry. She has also edited many poetry anthologies for adults and young people. She teaches creative writing and nature writing workshops.

PETER LOFTUS

North From Pfeiffer Burns, 2008
Oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in



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