



# CREATIVITEA

## THE ART OF TEA & MUSIC

茶人: Alec Bridges / Photography by Mikki Sage

*It is great to finally be reading an article by the person responsible for the soundtracks to so many of our videos! Tea has been instrumental to the creative process of sages for millenia. As a brilliant singer and songwriter, as well as a Chajin, Alec has a unique perspective on the role Tea can play in creativity. For most of us, a discussion of Tea and music is about what music we listen to as we drink tea, but for Alec, tea-drinking also informs the music he creates.*

**W**hy drink Tea?  
by listen to music?

There are many reasons, really. Some people drink tea for the taste, others for the beauty of the ceremony. Some people drink tea to connect with friends and community, while others wish to feel more at one with Nature. And some drink tea because it enhances their meditation practice, and some simply because they are thirsty and tea is within reach. There is no reason that is more right. They are all good. For whatever reason people drink tea, ultimately it is because it makes them feel a particular way. As we get to know tea better, it becomes apparent that tea has great depth and is capable of making one feel good in many ways, ranging from the simple satisfaction of sipping a warm, tasty beverage to a feeling of being deeply tranquil, connected and at peace. Music is similar in this regard. With so many sounds, instruments, voices, and ways in which to make them sing, the possibilities are infinite,

yet again it all boils down to how it makes you feel, with no approach being right or wrong. Like tea, the range of feelings evoked is vast, from potential for pure sensory enjoyment to real depth and connection.

Both tea and music make us feel a certain way, and thus bring us to a certain state of mind. I suppose this could be said about anything, but during a tea session these two things are very immediate, very deep, and they both connect the server with the receiver in the moment of service. Whether you are on the serving end or the receiving end, the potential for increased mindfulness and depth of being is undeniable. I find the act of serving tea and creating music strikingly similar. Both require much preparation that boils down to one moment of openness and connection to the Dao, the Universe, Buddha Nature, God, the Flying Spaghetti Monster or whatever you personally believe in. Through this connection, you set yourself to the side and become a bridge to those who are on the

receiving end. As a receiver, I find that however much presence and mindfulness you bring to either Tea or music is how much you get back. There is no music without a listener, as there are no constellations without humans to project images upon the stars. Without our minds to play connect-the-dots, melodies are merely unconnected sounds, each vanishing before the next arises in a new moment. Our presence is what gives music life and meaning. When both the server and the receiver are fully present together in a moment, that is when real magic occurs. And what better tool to become more fully present with than an old puerh or oolong, brewed with great mindfulness, skill and heart?

There have been so many occasions when, through centering myself with a meditative tea ceremony, I have gotten into the right mindset for enhanced creativity. Many of the songs I have written have been born in this way. Tea definitely helps in the creative process, and has for centuries.



# 音樂





Living in a busy city with the increased responsibilities that come with age—be they school, work, family, or all of the above—has a way of orienting the heart-mind in a less than ideal direction for creativity. Tea has greatly helped me to ease into the more fertile side of mind, and in a very enjoyable way. Bowl by bowl, the to-do list gradually fades away and becomes more of a to-be list, and my mind becomes more present for such things as writing music or lyrics-poetry. Not only that, but the quality of the songs I write after drinking tea is more in line with what I have strived towards for most of my songwriting life. Don't get me wrong—I love a good silly song to dance to or an intense song to shake my fists to, but my ultimate aim in writing music is to reflect Truth as best I can, and to inspire others to seek Truth as well. I find this much easier after a good session of “Hui An” aged puerh.

The above relationship does not end with writing. More and more, I find myself taking the special top-shelf teas down from their lofty abodes before recording a song in hopes that their essence will come through my voice and guitar, into your ears. A good example is the song “Signs,” which you will find in your August Global Tea Hut album, *Music of the Hut Vol. I*. Tea has been with that song every step of the way. It started with just the intro riff, which came to me after a tea session. Then the first lyrics, “Down from the mountain, down in the valley, with the moon above me to light my way,” inspired by Wu De telling me to sing devotional music to the spirit of Nature Herself. The next step was sharing the song in its incomplete state with fellow songwriters over tea. Their reactions further inspired me to continue writing, which led to its completion, and, of course, involved more tea drinking. Then, before recording all of my parts, I sat down with my favorite teas and meditated before committing my voice and guitar



to tape. Could I have done this without Tea? I suppose it is possible, but there was an ease, naturalness and enjoyment throughout the whole process that has not always been the case when it comes to writing and recording a song. I also feel the spirit of Tea strongly in this song when I play or listen to it. I attribute all of this to Tea.

I say all of this not to talk about myself, but to share an experience with you to illustrate what Tea and music are capable of beyond the burly, sensual enjoyment of them, and to invite you to explore how drinking tea in this way can enhance whatever it is that you love to do. We have all heard Wu De say,

“a radish farmer points the Way with a radish and I point the Way with tea.” In this instance, I am “pointing the Way” with music because I am a musician! I therefore invite you to sit quietly with your favorite tea and see how it can transform whatever it is with which you “point the Way.”







# 徵 兆

## *Lyrics of "Signs," by Alec Bridges*

Down from the mountain, down in the valley,  
With the moon above me to light my way.  
Dark magic night, with the smell of the pines,  
No inner light to guide my way,  
So I follow the sound of the stream until  
I find something that feels right.

I look to the Sky, saying, "send me a sign,"  
It says, "Open your eyes; don't be blind.  
I've given you everything you'll ever need  
to see right before your very eyes."  
But you keep looking for a sign,  
And you keep missing your life.  
You could be holding your prize,  
If you would only open your eyes.

Big beautiful world, wide as the sky,  
Hidden behind filtered eyes,  
Oh it's hiding behind the stories you tell  
while you're looking for some kind of

meaning in your life.  
But you keep looking for a sign,  
And you keep missing your life.  
You could be holding your prize,  
If you would only open your eyes.

Waiting for the wind to whisper;  
You hope it tells you everything  
you need to hear.  
Waiting for the wind to whisper,  
But it can't tell you anything  
you need to hear.  
No,  
Open your eyes.

You're waiting for the wind to whisper.  
It can't tell you anything you need to hear.  
No,  
Open your eyes, you're alive right now.  
Open your eyes.