

MYTHIC PASSAGES
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Audio Reviews by Brenda Sutton

Brenda Sutton is Event Coordinator for Mythic Imagination Institute and an award-winning singer/songwriter who performs with the internationally acclaimed band [Three Weird Sisters](#) and the Weird Family.

Stu Jenks *West of the Fire: Soundtracks for Photographs, Vol.II*
Fezziwig, 2005 - FEZ00001

If you were lucky enough to view the "Ancient Spirit, Modern Voice" art exhibit at Mythic Journeys '04, then you've heard Stu Jenks' music. You climbed the steps up to the stage and walked behind the dark curtain, flashlight in hand. Your eyes adjusted to the darkness, and you rounded a corner into [another land](#). The scent of prairie grasses filled the air. You stepped across a circle of faerie lights and gazed at images of desert sand, arroyos, and mystic fire. Quiet, tranquil music filled the darkness. Music composed by the artist to knit the entire experience together into one experiential piece.



What you heard then, and can hear again, was the soundtrack from inside photographer Stu Jenks' head. These are the melodies and rhythms he carried with him when he walked into the desert with his camera, tripod, Zippo lighter and magical hula hoop to capture images of transformation.

Not everyone sees the beauty in the desert. For some it is all bleak and dry and empty wasteland. Others, like Stu, who have the fortitude to take long and difficult treks down dusty roads, who have the patience to hold still until the sun moves a little lower in the sky, who see not just what's before the face but what's peeking from the corner of the eye — those lucky fey-touched few — see shimmering vistas and hear the desert breathe.

West of the Fire starts with such stillness that I wondered if my CD player was working. *Abajo Mountain Hoop Dance* ([image](#)) ([story](#)) is the sound of the lunar eclipse seen from an aspen forest. I find myself reaching for this sound over and over. I press the PLAY button and stretch into yoga. I press the PLAY button and let my fingers fly over the keyboard. I press the PLAY

button when the stress builds and I need, desperately need to take a walk with Stu down some desert track that only he and his lovely Annie know.

Each one of the cuts on this CD is a brief journey. The sounds are simple and soothing. [The Open Circle Cairn](#) slows your heartbeat and footfall for careful consideration of sacred space. Sound echos as it does in tombs and cairns and caves. Cool. Still. Centered. When the mind enters here, the spirit follows.

Stu is an artist who wants to affect all sensory points. Many of his photographs and musical compositions are also accompanied by creation stories. Ride along with the intrepid Mr. Jenks in his 4 x 4, hike into the canyon, onto the cliff face, along the river bank. Stand just behind him (and a little way from the cigarette smoke) while he makes his mojo. At [Molino Falls Blue](#) (image) (story) shapeshift from man — to bear — to man opening the shutter — to bear navigating waterslick rocks — to man a mile away.

[Aspens Ascending](#) (image) (story) is a double image of aspens in snow and the trunks rising to the heavens. The music that goes with these photos and the stories, evokes the feeling of determined and steady travel. Step. And step again. Find your rhythm. Keep your pace. Who is walking with you even when you walk alone?

I believe that everyone will get the heaven or hell that they perceive they have earned. The triptych of images that make up [If There's a Heaven, This is Heaven](#) (image) (story) give you a glimpse into Stu's idea of paradise. There is a dimension of scope that only he remembers, but this is the next best thing to being in Coalmine Canyon Flats.

The views and sounds for [West of the Fire](#) diptych (image) (story) were discovered on a journey of a Million Steps. This is what reverence sounds like. This is serenity and a heartfelt desire as Stu puts it to "make my spirit bigger." Look at this image, listen to this tune, and feel quiet satisfaction.

Not all of Stu's images are desert landscapes. There is no story written (yet) about [Rimpoche Allison Jones](#) but I'm eager to read it when it gets written. I want to know more about this person behind the smiling, wrinkled face. And I very much want to know what are those rows in the far distance. Irrigation? Trees? I can't tell. But Mr. Jones's friendly face is focused on another horizon. And I'm sure that Stu will tell me when he reads this. I'll pass it along.

I scoured Stu Jenk's web site searching for a photo captioned [Death Valley Hoop Dance](#) and couldn't find it. I did, however find this "hoopdance". (image) (story) and it matches the fire dancing around the circle below a slowly dying sunset.

[Canelo Lullaby](#) (image) (story) is a cottonwood breeze at the end of the day, a warm cup of tea, and a lover's embrace. Comfort. Contentment. Closure.

You can hear five of the tracks at: cdbaby.com/cd/jenks

You can also purchase [West of the Fire](#) at: projekt.com.