



Mason Williams

Saving Rivers with Music

For musician Mason Williams, "river" is the ultimate metaphor in life. "Music is just like water," says the Grammy award-winning composer. "Both flow through time perfecting themselves while reflecting culture." That's why Williams has chosen music to advance the cause of river conservation.

For Williams, environmental awareness and activism began when a local utility proposed several hydroelectric dams on his favorite trout stream near his home in Oakridge, Oregon. In 1982, he was just another concerned citizen attending a series of public meetings. He wanted to get mad, but he had a better idea. He knew that getting the river to the meeting would be a bold statement, but hardly practical. He also realized that getting people down to the river to discuss the issues wasn't going to happen either. Then, why not have the river be represented through the music it had inspired? From this experience came *Of Time and River Flowing*, a series of benefit concerts raising funds to make the public aware of issues involving the fate of rivers. He selected songs that would "talk about all the different relationships people have with rivers."

Rivers have been routes of exploration, territorial boundaries and commercial highways, and have sustained people with water, food, recreation,



beauty and inspiration. Prior to our century, rivers were more than a conveyance; they were a way of life. Songs were written about quiet times by the river shore, of loggers and boatmen, or people using the river as a workhorse. Much of society has forgotten this. Williams views his concerts as a way to give rivers a voice. "Rivers remind us of what we mean to each other," he says.

Williams considers himself a musician, preferring to stay away from polemics. But he has chosen to use his music to help restore rivers to a better state. Last November he helped celebrate the 25th anniversary of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, appearing with Al Gore and British Columbia Premier Michale Harcourt. "I want to show that the river is nonpartisan," he says. "It's neither Democrat nor Republican. It flows through everybody's life."

The musician is proud of what he's helped accomplish, starting with Oregon's North Fork of the Willamette. Within one year, money raised from his benefit concerts was used by conservation groups to help lobby a bill through State Legislature. The new law designated the river and its source, Waldo Lake, as State Scenic Waterways, effectively prohibiting new state dams. "I've collected a thousand songs about water but I've found very few about dams, except for the ones Woody Guthrie was paid to write," he says.

Between concerts and recording (he released a new CD last fall), Williams gets out, whenever he can, to enjoy rivers and remember why they are so important. And in the process he's learned a lot about waterways and himself. "If you alter them too much, your relationship with them isn't the same," he says. "You've lost the river as a neighbor and member of your community."

"You go down the river for lots of reasons and, the more times you go, the more reasons you find," he adds. "I

live on a river and grew up on one. It seems like standing up for a member of the family."

— Peter Stokel

AIRE's Alan Hamilton

Alan Hamilton, 38, is not your typical business man. In fact, he's a self-described "Aire-head"; his title at Boise, Idaho's AIRE Inc. is Official Airehead in Charge of Marketing. But titles can be misleading. Under Hamilton's guidance, AIRE has grown from making 45 boats in 1989 to more than 2,500 in '94.

A lot of that might stem from the fact that he was a banker before he was a boater. Where most people leave jobs in the paddling profession for more lucrative pastures, Hamilton left the security of a banking job with First Interstate for the riskier prospect of working in whitewater. And he found boating to be riskier in more ways than one. His first experience in whitewater came when he was 25 on Idaho's Lower Selway in 1980. "We were inexperienced," he says. "We flipped in the first wave of the first rapid. I got hooked on it that day."

Getting hooked on the sport soon led to getting hooked up with some of the leading players in the industry. One of these was Bill Parker, owner of Idaho's Northwest River Supplies, who asked Hamilton to become general manager of Northwest, a position he held until '88. During this time Hamilton met his future partner Kris Walker, who introduced him to the Argonaut cataraft, a Walker design made by Northwest. At first Northwest didn't have much success in selling catarafts. But as Hamilton and others began taking them on first raft descents, catarafts' popularity began to increase. A lot of this also had to do with a video called *The Great White Hunters*, which captured many of their descents on tape. "It