

# BRAIN CANDY

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PORTRAIT BY BEN ROSE

## ROCKING OUT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

*Nicolas Bouckaert's Echo Project Is Propelling the Green Movement*

**N**icolas Bouckaert learned early about proper stewardship of the land. His parents own a Dalton carpet mill and a North Georgia horse farm where he spent tons of time outdoors. "My dad has been a big investor in land and taught us to take care of it," says the rangy 25-year-old. "Whenever we were driving on the farm and saw any trash, he stopped to pick it up, even if he was still in his suit." Now Bouckaert is turning another family property, on the Chattahoochee south of town, into a laboratory for spreading environmental awareness. It is the venue for The Echo Project music festival, from October 12th through the 14th. Bands including **The Killers, The Flaming Lips, Bravery, Spoon, Cat Power, Perpetual Groove, Michael Franti and Spearhead, Cypress Hill** and **The Roots** will gather along with thousands of fans for an event that aims to minimize its own ecological footprint while inspiring people to take green action. Echo equals eco, get it?

Bouckaert got a taste for music promotion early, when he helped produce rock concerts at his high school. Later, after becoming a devotee of **The Disco Biscuits** (also in the lineup), he started attending festivals, including the massive annual Rock Werchter in Belgium. He was impressed with the practical green solutions he saw there, such as "initiatives for self-cleaning. For example, if you pick up 10 plastic beer cups you can turn them in for a ticket to get free beer."

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"I thought self-cleaning was what my oven does at 1,000 degrees," remarked my cynical pal the **Trend Spotter**. "Will anybody be passing out Kool-Aid? Or will all the participants already have drunk theirs?"

Green is the color of the season, carbon offsets the must-have accessory. And there is a certain starry optimism on the part of those involved in The Echo Project. Bouckaert has secured a 10-year permit to hold the festival annually. "We call it a project because we want it to evolve every year and continue to become more advanced in being carbon-neutral," Bouckaert explains. "And ideally, someday down the line, we want the entire festival to be powered by an alternative energy source." But solutions to big challenges—such as energy sustainability, or even powering a festival—need to be constructed slowly, out of many small parts, and The Echo Project



Environmental trailblazer Nicolas Bouckaert, 25, with his dog Bisco at the Chattahoochee site of The Echo Project.

incorporates a number of these.

From every ticket sold, 15 cents will be donated to Trees for the Future, an organization that has been planting trees throughout the world since the

early '70s. Buyers can also choose to pay a \$4 upgrade for a Be Green Ticket, which will subsidize production of 500 kilowatt hours of energy from renewable sources. Think of it as making up for car-

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**All-star lineup.** In addition to its intended philanthropic effect, The Echo Project will also offer top-notch entertainment in the form of The Killers, left, and The Flaming Lips, right, as well as, below, from left, Cat Power and the Dirty Delta Blues, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah and Cypress Hill.



bon emitted by your SUV en route to the event. Actually, it's a good thing your SUV is so big, because people are encouraged to carpool to the site. Vendors are required to use biodegradable plates, and a plastics company has donated biodegradable trash bags. A volunteer effort will have spent a day at the site, before the event, cleaning up the riverfront. And a workshop is planned to give participants hands-on experience building the type of solar array that could power a festival stage. It's "a baby-step

people's thinking and spur them to alter how they live?" "Music lovers tend to be a demographic that absolutely cares about the environment, participates, camps, is very active and aware and wants to do their part," says **Neal Turley** of Sustainable Waves. "And then there is a natural tendency for an artist, a musician—who sees these things and reacts to his world and environment—to write songs about it."

At this, TS just snorted. "I'd call it preaching to the choir, but it's more like the choir and the congre-

buy, in how they live day to day. That's where the difference starts."

As for actual preaching, don't expect all that much. Perpetual Groove, for example, claims that its March release, *LIVELOVEDIE*, is the first album ever produced in a completely green way through the use of renewable energy credits. The band buys carbon offsets for its tours and will soon include these in the price of every ticket it sells. Still, McDonald says, "We've never been overtly political on the stage. I don't think we ever will be. There's that nice thing about music that none of that matters, and people can still get something out of it. The way we live our lives and the way we've been running our business make a pretty clear statement."

"I'll hug a tree as soon as the next guy," said the Trend Spotter magnanimously, reaching up to polish his own halo. "Or plant one for a carbon offset. Why not? It hardly requires any sacrifice on my part."

But will we really be able to party our way to a green future? "People want to have the same reliability but are not actually willing to take any risks and do anything different," observes Turley. "And that's the challenge that all of us as a society have to overcome." ☺

## Can attending an entertainment event change people's thinking and spur them to alter how they live?

process," says **Mark McLarry** of Sustainable Waves, which provides green production facilities for the music industry and is bringing a solar-powered stage and other clean-power technology to the festival. "We're not trying to put claims out there that this is going to be the greenest event in the world," McLarry says. "But it's going to be obvious that we've gone above and beyond."

Can attending an entertainment event change

gation singing 'Kumbaya' as a round," he declared. Oh, dear. I do try to be charitable about my friend's passive-aggressive attitude. The world just makes him feel so helpless. He's not alone. "People tend to get overwhelmed, like, 'There's this massive world problem, I can't do anything to change it,'" **Perpetual Groove** guitarist **Matt McDonald** says. "The whole idea is to show people that they can, by making changes in their personal lives, in the products they

