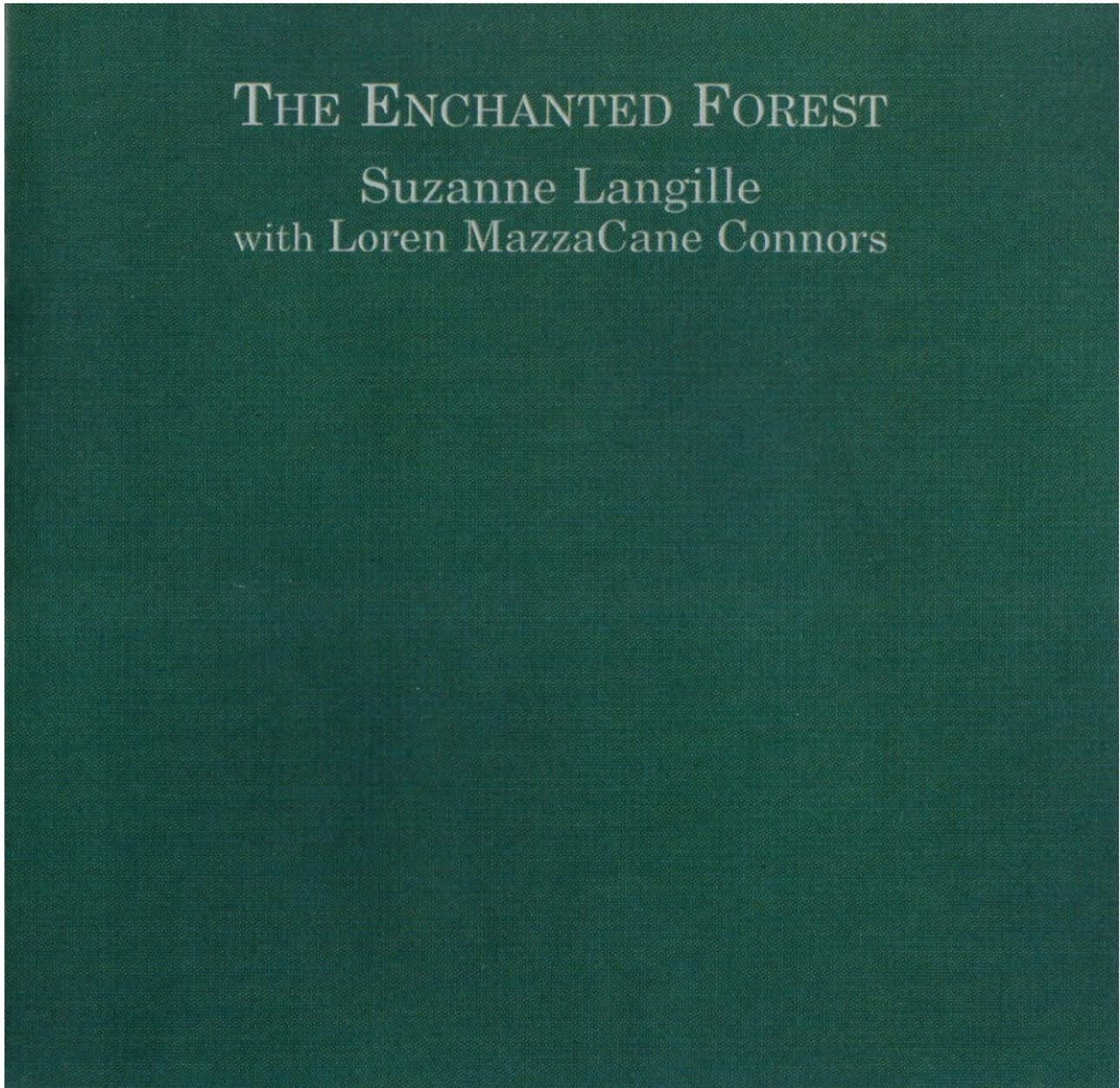


# Pick of the Day: 'The Enchanted Forest' by Suzanne Langille and Loren Connors (1998)

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It's not the trees in a forest that make it frightening — it's the spaces between, the sylvan caverns and canyons where wild beasts prowl and ancient magic seems to take root. This phenomenon explains why Suzanne Langille and Loren Connors' *The Enchanted Forest* is so spellbinding in its evocation of the dark secrets of the woods in spite of comprising no more than Langille's voice, barely rising above a whisper, and Connors' lightly amplified filigrees of guitar. It's in the chasms between Connors' notes that the story unfolds. He rarely strays from

portentous minor, and the delineations between tracks are almost imperceptible. Once you're deep enough into this 1998 jewel of an ambient folk record, it's easy to feel like you've been going in circles.

"The forest spoke to me," goes an early and memorable lyric. This is the kind of album where such a line makes perfect sense, sending shivers of magic through the proceedings. There's a sort of story running through the record, but for the first half of the album we're at home among Langille's paintings of silver butterflies and high-flying ravens — classic aesthetic fantasy stuff we might hear on a Zeppelin brit-folk odyssey or the knottier thickets of *Astral Weeks*. Langille introduces characters — a woman with a child, some wild animals, an "Uncle Joe," the ominous presence of a forester. A decisive break comes about halfway through. "You should leave here," warns Uncle Joe, and suddenly those voices from the woods don't seem so benevolent.

The album loses some of its mystery as it progresses, and its allure is inversely proportional to the number of times "Uncle Joe" is said. A narrative doesn't really help an album that does such a great job of simulating the feeling of being lost, and even against our better judgment we find ourselves following it. And it ends in the middle of things. The forester seems to have some sort of nefarious plan for the heroine's child, and she turns to some sort of oracle for advice but the record ends before she can receive it. I often find myself listening to this album on the same walks as the Microphones' *The Glow, Pt. 2* or Dear Nora's *Mountain Rock*, two other albums that beckon us deep into the forest but lead us back out before we're quite ready.

Loren Connors has a long and storied career. He first emerged in the '70s as a blues guitarist and found fans in folk-archivist circles before becoming an underground cult figure. His work is harder to discover than it is to enjoy. He has dozens of solo guitar albums to his name, almost all of which are good (*Airs* is probably the best introduction; my personal fave is *St. Vincent Newsboys Home*). He's married to Langille, who's chiefly known for working with her husband but ought to be more in-demand. It's tricky to make music this ambient with vocals, especially ones so comprehensible and untreated, but her voice floats easily above the music — a voice you suspect is so quiet because she's trying to hide.

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