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**THIRTEEN's *W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree*
Examines the Life & Work of the Poet Laureate
Two-Time Pulitzer Winner
Environmental Activist
Airing in April on PBS**

It has been more than four decades since Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) founded Earth Day and held its first celebration on April 22, 1970, launching the birth of the modern environmental movement.

This April, as we mark the 46th anniversary of Earth Day (April 22, 2016), THIRTEEN presents ***W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree***, an in-depth look at the life and work of United States Poet Laureate, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and environmental activist, W.S. Merwin.

The one-hour documentary will be available to PBS stations nationwide starting April 15 (check local listings). In New York, ***W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree*** premieres Wednesday, April 20 at 10 p.m. ET on THIRTEEN.

For over three decades, in addition to receiving almost every extant major poetry prize, including the National Book Award, Merwin has dedicated himself to preserving and regenerating native plants and palms at his home known as the Merwin Conservancy, a 19-acre site on the north shore of Maui, Hawaii.

Now in his 89th year, Merwin has amassed the most comprehensive private collection of palms in the world, with over 800 species. His tangible actions to nurture his surrounding environment go hand-in-hand with his poetry – which he recites in the documentary – offering insight and humor on the human experience and providing a refreshing sense of the relevance of poetry in our lives today.

Filmed over the course of three years with Merwin in Hawaii, at his farmhouse in France, and during several reading tours, his story unfolds through interviews with the man himself, his family, friends and colleagues including Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor of humanities, Yale University; John Burnham Schwartz, author and stepson; Dr. John Dransfield, former head of palm research, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Robert Faggen, professor of literature, Claremont McKenna College; Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahale, PhD, Kumu Hula and professor, University of Hawaii; J.D. McClatchy, professor of English, Yale University; Paula Merwin, wife; and Naomi Shihab Nye, poet. There is also archival footage of Merwin in a 2009 conversation with Bill Moyers from *Bill Moyers Journal*.

Merwin shares what it was like being the son of a Presbyterian preacher and growing up in Union City, West Hoboken, NJ. He candidly talks about his repressive childhood including not being allowed to have much to do with other kids. "He had a completely different childhood from most people's," says Burnham Schwartz. "He was writing hymns for his father when he was a small child..."

But trying to write these hymns was when he first began to write poems. "I didn't know what it was, but the moment I tried to write these little verses, I realized there's a very distant connection with that, and that's what I wanted to do is write poems," says Merwin.

The documentary explores Merwin's relationship with his wife Paula, why he never wanted to be part of an establishment by teaching, his embrace of Buddhism, the importance of his visit with poet Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and more.

As fellow poet Nye relates, "...I remember writing on the first day I ever read his poems, 'I think this is a voice that could save us,' And I still think that, having read him now for more than 40 years – it is a voice that could save us, if enough people paid attention to what it says."

W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree is taken from an 82-minute feature documentary entitled *Even Though The Whole World Is Burning*, which has played at numerous film festivals and educational venues, including: the Maui Film Festival, the Hawaii International Film Festival, the Buddhist Film Festival, the Environmental Film Festival, the DOXA Documentary Film Festival and the Sun Valley Writer's Conference.

W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree is a production of Cicala Filmworks in association with THIRTEEN Productions LLC for WNET. Director/Producer is Stefan Schaefer. Producer is Williams Cole. Executive Producers are Robert Becker and Sarah Cavanaugh.

Corporate support for the PBS presentation of ***W.S. Merwin: To Plant a Tree*** is provided by The Hotels & Resorts of Halekulani, celebrating W.S. Merwin and his creation of a legacy for a sustainable future.

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