

Amid the swirling traffic of London's Marble Arch stands a witness to the beginning of the entertainment industry's campaign to save the atmosphere. It's a cherry tree - and, appropriately enough, it was planted by the singer, Neneh Cherry.

Now international stars are falling over themselves to join the battle against global warming. Some, like Leonardo di Caprio and Cameron Diaz, are among the world's foremost environmental campaigners, but many are now taking steps to shrink their own carbon footprints and pressing for change, as this summer's worldwide Live Earth concerts testified.

But then, as Cherry told *Our Planet*, it was "very, very early days". The tree was planted to mark the founding of the pioneering carbon offset campaign, Future Forests. And her involvement had begun when she met its founder, Dan Morrell, around a camp fire in a "very, very muddy field" at the open air Glastonbury music festival.

She says: "I was really turned on by the fantastic concept of planting the amount of trees needed to consume your waste. It was very straightforward, very simple and very pragmatic - something people could really get their heads around."

She introduced Morrell to other stars, including Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys, and there was "a domino effect" of others wanting to get involved. Both she and the Pet Shop Boys started offsetting their tours and within three years had produced 1.5 million carbon neutral CDs between them. Other groups - including The Levellers, Pulp, Pink Floyd and Atomic Kitten - were quick to join in.

Neneh Marianne Karlsson Cherry was born 43 years ago in Stockholm to Amahdu Jah, a Sierra Leonian percussionist and a noted Swedish painter and textile artist, Monika Karlsson. Her mother married the renowned jazz trumpet player, Don Cherry and she was brought up in New York and the small Swedish town of Hässleholm. She traces her interest in the environment to those early days. "The countryside of Sweden has been where I feel I belong. I have seen the trees around me grow. The ones that were smaller than me are now bigger than me and the ones that were bigger than me now tower over me. And quite a lot of them have been cut down, and that has almost broken my heart at times."

She dropped out of school at 14 and went to London to start her music career. Her family is steeped in the business. Her half-brother, Eagle-Eye Cherry, is also a well-known musician; her sister, Titiyo Jah, is a successful Swedish singer; and she is married to producer, Cameron McVey.

She is a strong supporter of the United Nations and has also taken up the causes of AIDS - helping to produce an early album to raise awareness - and the fight against malaria, joining singer and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Youssou N'Dour in the 'United against Malaria' concert in Geneva two years ago.

She says: "If I can draw attention to an issue as an artist, I feel it is my responsibility as a human being to do what I can." And she believes that the tide is starting to turn. "In the past not enough people have been alarmed enough at what is happening to the environment. But it seems that now the world is beginning to wake up."

Neneh Cherry