

Music as a ladder, and a bridge – Soul Food 2017 Pontiac Creative Arts Center

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man.... it is harmony and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and the end of foreignness; it is the being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

The Blessed Beauty saith: 'Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch.' ...

For this reason must all human beings powerfully sustain one another and seek for everlasting life.... Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help. Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines. -Abdu'l Bahá

'Captain Jack', as he's known, plans to read this to the young basketball players he coaches. Musician Bob Schneeweis read the piece before a standing-room-only crowd at the January 22 Soul Food event at Pontiac Creative Arts Center. Schneeweis had barely uttered the final word when Captain Jack raised his hand and said: "I'll need a copy of that!"

"I leave here now with a totally cleansed spirit."

He got his copy of the reading, along with one about compassion, which was also read aloud (text below). "I coach basketball," Captain Jack later explained. "I like to read to the young people. These young people are busy on the internet and this and that but they never hear this soul language, this language that comes from the heart...It's good for people to hear positive words."

It seemed everyone had come thirsty for just that. "We're all going to do a positive thing today – something that's going to elevate you when you're down," arts commissioner Dwayne Anthony said as he opened the event, prompting relieved sighs and cheers of "Yesss" from those gathered.



Spanning cultures, aligning hearts

Reverence and delight as singers offer thanks to all grandmothers, grandfathers, the moon, the earth, and water in the *Anishinaabemowin* language. Tears at Rumi's poem about the transcendence of song. A mesmerizing education in South Indian classical music. Several generations tap and sway to Gillespie and Coltrane.

Silence and awe as a clarinetist plays a movement from the *Quartet for the End of Time*. A percussionist speaks of how our brainwaves align at the sound of drumming. An invitation to fly. Everyone stomps and claps in unison, singing *Oh Happy Day*.

Oakland University student Zollie observed that while people had to make room for one another in the crowded venue, “no one was getting testy. In fact the proximity really brought people together.”

***What does an event like this provide?
Azar: “Oh, healing! Healing.”***

For Hormoz, the evening provided an experience that’s not easy to come by. “I felt very much at home, very much moved, and very inspired by the whole affair and the love that you feel.”

“Soul-cleansing” is how drummer and OU alumnus GayeLynn McKinney described music and community. “I can’t tell you how spiritually uplifting this is.” She said she had started the day with a heavy heart. But after playing at a morning church service where children sang, and then Soul Food at the PCAC, “I leave here now with a totally cleansed spirit.” She thanked people for supporting the arts, particularly at a time when arts funding is threatened.



***A young girl asked about every instrument on the stage.
“What’s that?”
OU student: “It’s a gyl. From Ghana in Africa.”
“What’s that?”
Her companion:
“It’s a clarinet.
It sounds like birds.”***



Music bridging gaps

One Pontiac resident who studies at Oakland University said he appreciates the collaboration between OU and the Pontiac community. He said while he was growing up Auburn Hills and the OU campus seemed very disconnected from Pontiac. But now he’s optimistic that OU is increasingly engaging the people of Pontiac and a bond is developing.

He felt moved by the South Indian classical music. He said there is a significant Indian population in Pontiac, but this was his first time really connecting with the music.



The auto industry's collapse in the region is no reason to give up on the arts, he said. Another audience member lamented the current lack of live music venues in Pontiac, pointing out that the city used to have its own Baker's jazz club.

Zollie said he voted – as a resident of Pontiac – in favor of a millage for youth centers. "I think this is exactly the kind of organization that should be getting funding." He said many there expressed excitement about further collaboration with Oakland University.



In fact, the event stemmed in part from a talk OU professor Mark Stone had with Marvin "Doc" Holladay, who established the jazz and world music programs at OU in the 1970s. Holladay, now based in Ecuador, told Professor Stone about gatherings there that offered "food for the soul". Holladay said a friend had brought the concept to Ecuador after an experience in Australia.

A happening like this changes one's perception, Holladay said. "It elevates you to another plane of awareness...And you take it with you. It begins to alter the way you see things, the way you think of things, and the way you feel about things."

Holladay said the turbulence the world is now seeing has to take place, until finally a shift happens. "The future is just beautiful – but! It's going to take a lot of perseverance, and unification of the people," he said. "We have to counteract all the horrible things that are going on by doing things that elevate us and make us understand we are really something way better. We're all one big family, all over this planet."

***"And even if the whole world's harps should burn up,
there will still be hidden instruments playing." Rumi***

Pat, who was at the PCAC event, said the past year has been troubling for people as individuals and as a nation. "It was so good to be a part of something that brought people together in a healing, joy-filled way that stays with you long after it's over."

Another participant said the gathering provided a much-needed boost. "It's uplifting because music releases something in you. What can you do? You just have to keep communicating and talking with people."





From Australia to Ecuador to Michigan to California

Brian, who was in the audience and joined artists on stage for one number, said he can't wait to get back to his home base in San Diego "to tell them about Pontiac".

"Multicultural, interfaith, intergenerational, across genres, spanning the world – it's so very special," he said. "Sharing the story of this night, I feel I can help generate other events like this. And we carry the vibration of this wherever we go – whatever homes we go to, whatever families we go to, whatever parts of the world or parts of the country we go to. This vibration is so very healing, so very loving, so very needed, so very unifying in a way that honors humanity and honors the natural world and honors the spirit however we experience it."

Afterword

To think I almost missed this occasion. I was quite low in the days running up to 'Soul Food' and a couple of times I actually thought of bowing out. In the end I knew I could *not* let Professor Mark Stone down. Also, though, I knew that my despondency was all the more reason I had to go. Since that evening, in moments when I've teetered toward debilitating frustration and discouragement, what has pulled me back many times is a sense that I must honor the love and positive vibe that the Soul Food event handed to us. Grateful.



Literary sustenance offered at Soul Food 2017

Don't worry about saving these songs!
And if one of our instruments breaks, it doesn't matter.
We have fallen into the place where everything is music.
The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harps should burn up,
there will still be hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint, and a spark.
This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spin drift
and the edge of driftwood along the beach, wanting!
They derive from a slow and powerful root
that we can't see.
Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
and let the spirits fly in and out.

-Rumi



We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high.

-Bahá'u'lláh

The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit. Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure, and melodies have great influence in them. The latent talents with which the hearts of these children are endowed will find expression through the medium of music.

-Abdu'l Bahá

Classical music has its roots in the seven basic notes. In the Indian system of music, these are called Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ni and Sa.

This song shows the virtues of the seven notes and the effects it has on the human body. Combined with the aspect of devotion to God that is embedded within this song, along with the fast pace of the song, this song will bring peace and joy to anyone who sings it or evens listens to it.

Like any system of music, this song has a rhythm aspect to it. Rhythm is called "Tala" in Indian music and this song is set to a six-beat cycle called Rupaka tala.

-Jay Balan

The ground for compassion is established first by practicing sensitivity towards ourselves. True compassion arises from a healthy sense of self, from an awareness of who we are that honors our own capacities and fears, our own feelings and integrity, along with those of others. It is never based on fear or pity but is a deep supportive response of the heart based on the dignity, integrity, and well-being of every single creature. It is a spontaneous response to the suffering and pain we encounter. It is our feeling of mutual resonance and natural connectedness in the face of universal experience of loss and pain. As our own heart is opened and healed, it naturally seeks the healing of all it touches. Compassion for ourselves gives rise to the power to transform resentment into forgiveness, hatred into friendliness, and fear into respect for all beings. It allows us to extend warmth, sensitivity, and openness to the sorrows, around us in a truthful and genuine way. Compassion may at times give rise to action, and at times it may not. It doesn't arise in order to solve problems. Yet out of compassion flows action whenever it be taken. True compassion arises from a sense that the heart has a fearless capacity to embrace all things, to touch all things, to relate to all things.

A Path With Heart by Jack Kornfield

I saw a mighty angel descending from heaven, clad in mist, having around his head a rainbow. His face was like the sun, his feet like pillars of fire. He placed his right foot on the sea, his left on the earth, and standing thus on the sea and the earth he lifted his hand toward heaven and swore by Him who liveth for ever and ever, saying: "There shall be time no longer, but at the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel the mystery of God shall be consummated."

-Revelation, X

The *Quartet for the End of Time* was composed by Olivier Messiaen during his captivity at a prisoner of war camp in Germany. Messiaen said the piece is directly inspired by this excerpt from 'The Revelation of St John'.

Finally, brethren,
whatsoever things are true,
whatsoever things are honest,
whatsoever things are just,
whatsoever things are pure,
whatsoever things are lovely,
whatsoever things are of good
report; if there be any virtue,
and if there be any praise,
think on these things.

Philippians 4:8



Listening is one of the fundamental tenets of any religious or spiritual belief. By quieting our minds and bodies, we are better able to experience the world and the vibrations that surround us. But just as important, we are better able to understand our internal vibrations and personal energies.

For centuries drumming has served as a universal and vibrational language that connects such energies; connecting mother earth with the people of earth, and furthermore connecting the people of earth with each other.

Modern research now qualifies as authentic what has long been known in indigenous drum cultures throughout the world. Studies now look at the healing power of drumming and its medicinal effects on Alzheimer's patients, autistic children, and emotionally disturbed teens. In addition, corporations have seen how the vibrations of drumming help employees focus their attention, reduce their stress levels, and improve morale.

As human beings it is important that we remember two things:

1. We are largely comprised of water.
2. Water is highly receptive to vibrations and energy.

Thus we are reminded that just as sound waves penetrate and travel through water, sounds also permeate our bodies and affect our vibrations and energies.



In her book *When the Drummers Were Women*, the late Layne Redmond states that one of the most powerful aspects of drumming is its ability to change people's consciousness.

This is largely due to the law of entrainment, or the tendency of objects moving in a similar pattern and tempo to align with one another. Nature adheres to this law on many levels. A classic example is of two swinging pendulums which over time gradually align and begin to swing in unison. Entrainment is also evident when birds fly together in migration patterns and flap their wings in rhythm together and glide at the same times.

Human beings are no less affected by this natural law. When a group of people play a rhythm for an extended period of time, their brain waves become entrained to the rhythm and they have a shared brain wave state. The longer the drumming goes on, the more powerful the entrainment becomes.

Thus through rhythmic repetition of sounds, the body, brain, and nervous system can be energized and transformed.

So thank you to all of the musicians who are here today creating positive energy, and thank you to everyone in attendance. And let us move forward in life confident in knowing that our positive vibrations can and will impact the world we live in.

The Healing/Spiritual Power of Drums
-Chinelo 'Chi' Amen-Ra

**I expect to pass through this world but once.
Any good thing, therefore, that I can do
or any kindness I can show to any fellow human being
let me do it now.
Let me not defer nor neglect it;
for I shall not pass this way again.**

Powers of the Psalms by Anna Riva



**Article by Nancy Palus
Interviews by Zollie Schut and Nancy Palus**

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**Soul Food Event Organized by
Pontiac Arts Commissioners
Mark Stone and Dwayne Anthony**

Hosted by the Pontiac Creative Arts Center
Sunday, January 22 2017

Featured Artists
Spirits Rising
South Indian Classical Quartet
Oakland Jazz Sextet
Biakuye Percussion Group
George Stoffan
Men of Grace