

## Is This Heaven?

A Reflection on *CultureFest*

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In the film *Field of Dreams* one of the characters asks, "Is this Heaven?" Another replies, "No. It's Iowa." On a beautiful New England late summer weekend, I asked myself the same question, "Is this Heaven?"

Dancers from Maine, Connecticut, Canada, New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, Ohio, Cape Cod, and more than ten different Massachusetts towns gathered to celebrate and dance their divine diversity in *CultureFest*, the first event sponsored by the Sacred Dance Guild's (SDG) new social justice initiative, *SDGO (Sacred Dance Global Outreach)*, and held September 18-20, 2009 in Lexington, Massachusetts.

*CultureFest* weekend began on Friday at Hancock Church with an evening of sacred circle dancing hosted by *Skyloom*, a local sacred dance company. The excitement was palpable, as participants shared and experienced dances from around the world. We held close to one another, dancing our way from ancient times to the present in a lovely candlelit room. Even Fleur, the delicate dancing dog, whimpered her delight, while bouncing in her owner's backpack to the changing rhythms.

Saturday was workshop day, and we began with SDG president JoyBeth Lufty leading us in a warm-up that honored traditions from around the world. As we physically, spiritually, and mentally prepared ourselves for an intense day of dance, a sunbeam streamed in from a skylight above and illuminated JoyBeth's hair in a perfect halo. We knew from that moment that we were indeed dancing the divine connection.

The day continued with multicultural workshops in Chinese, Armenian, and classical Indian dance. We ended the day with a soothing movement meditation led by Helena Froehlich of CreationDance Company.

Sunday afternoon we gathered at the National Heritage Museum for our "**Moving Mysteries**" Benefit Concert. The lobby was elegantly decorated with Sacred Dance Guild banners and posters, as well as supplied with information on SDG and COAF (Children of Armenia Fund), our *CultureFest* collaborating organization. More than fifty dancers performed in a diverse program that included liturgical, lyrical, classical Indian, Chinese, classical ballet, Bulgarian folk dance, Serbian folk dance, tap dance, and contemporary jazz genres.

To prepare the sacred space, the concert began with a ritual dance performed by *Skyloom* to the song "*Moving Mysteries*," the theme song of SDG's Golden Jubilee

Festival (2008), composed by member Emmalyn Moreno. Performers present in the theatre stood and joined Skyloom in gesture as we danced down the aisles. While dancing, I noticed Mary Jane Wolbers, one of SDG's founding members, seated in the back of the theater, beaming a supportive smile. What a lovely surprise to have Mary Jane with us on this historic occasion, the inaugural event of our global outreach initiative.

As the concert continued, dancers took their turns onstage, then returned to their seats in the theatre to observe and applaud one another. I have never seen so many smiles radiating intense joy at the same time as I did that afternoon. The program closed with Skyloom leading everyone in song: "*Go Now in Peace, go now in peace. May the love of dance surround you. Everywhere, everywhere you may go.*" As Skyloom played brass bells and sang, all the dancers came together on the stage swaying and singing in peace and harmony. As the last tiny bell rang its final note, the theater went dark. Our prayerful and powerful concert was over. There was a momentary hush. Then, as the house lights came up, smiles and well-deserved applause broke out! And thus, our first, glorious SD-GO CultureFest weekend came to an end.

Thank you to the many volunteers who helped make *CultureFest* a success especially SDG members Karen Josephson, JoyBeth Lufty, Mary Kamp, Linda Telesco, Shirley Blancke, Wendy and John Morrell. It was a delight and a privilege to coordinate our first SDGO event. May we have many more.