CHAPTER 18

THE COSMIC CELEBRATION: Ritual Theater As Spiritual Awakening

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“Art is born out of the emotion of glorification. That which triggers off creativity is glorification.” (Pir Vilayat, Unpublished teachings, Sufi Meditation Camp)

THE COSMIC CELEBRATION, is a large scale mythic pageant, celebrating the unity of all religious paths and the human family. Originally, this theatrical pageant was created as a meditation in action that ritualized ancient spiritual teachings for Sufi meditation students. It was conceived by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, head of The Sufi Order International.

Pir Vilayat:

“The COSMIC CELEBRATION is a vast pageant which embodies the aims underlying all religious rituals, that which has drawn man to the spiritual life since the beginning of time: it creates a psychological environment in which human beings are able to recollect the cosmic drama behind all earthly events.”

(THE COSMIC CELEBRATION theatrical program, 1977)

As a playwright and theater director, it was my privilege to be invited to translate this vision into a theatrical pageant form that integrated Pir Vilayat’s narration with forms from experimental and ritual theater. It was performed in Boston, 1974, 1977 (in two

Allaudin Mathieu, a very gifted professional musician, music teacher and director of The Sufi Choir, directed and arranged the music, and composed some original music. The script and the rehearsal processes to make the meaning come alive through the performers, evolved over a period of eleven years.

**The Beginnings:**

It was the early 70’s. The climate was still like the 60’s. Fly to new heights, through drugs, through sit-ins, through meditation. Anything is possible. The old systems don’t work. We must free up our psyches. We must free up the ‘system’s’ hold on us. That means government; that means education; that means inhibitions; that means rules; that means dogma. It’s time to build a new world, in new ways.

Often through a drug experience, people discovered metaphysical realities that opened them to begin their search. In many cases, this lead people to become serious seekers on different spiritual paths. Meditation became a way to experience altered states of consciousness without having to take any foreign substance.

In this millieu, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, head of The Sufi Order in the West, came to this country and began teaching meditation and guiding mureeds (students) on their spiritual path. Soon after I took initiation, on this path, I had what is called ‘darshan’ with Pir Vilayat. Darshan means ‘the glance.’ It refers to the process of a teacher seeing
into the soul of the pupil, and reflecting what is seen back to the mureed. During this interview, he told me that I was there to help him, referring to my professional theater experience, and that I would have the angelic planes revealed to me. He was referring to the celestial spheres of higher consciousness that are reflected in all of the mystical traditions. In this case, he was particularly making reference to the higher planes of light described in the Kabbalah, the Book of Splendor in Mystical Judaism. Later he gave me the name Saphira, which is the name (sephira) of those angelic planes in the Kabbalah. It has a Hebrew root, but also an Arabic, and Greek root. Pir Vilayat’s reference to helping him, being given many experiences of these realms of light and taking on my new name became the foundation, the beginning of my training and the first tools to help me fulfill my producing-directing role in the evolution of THE COSMIC MASS, later to be called THE COSMIC CELEBRATION. A complex series of spiritual practices that became the basis for the rehearsal process evolved for thousands of participants in the many productions in the U.S. and Europe.

For the next two summers after my initiation, Pir Vilayat invited me to assist him in creating and producing a pageant at the summer meditation camps in California based on The Holy Grail legend. It was to be a spiritual practice for everyone in the camp. There was to be no audience; everyone would participate. In telling the story of Parsival and his journey to find The Holy Grail, Pir Vilayat cast everyone into roles according to who their souls were. The role was to become a spiritual practice, an inner concentration which became physicalized into a character in the myth, an angelic being on one of the planes of light or states of higher consciousness, a certain energy field, a musical
expression of the celestial spheres, etc. It was my job, to help people translate these inner states into outer expressions.

I remember when we did our first camp pageant, Allaudin Mathieu, the musician I referred to, and I were working together on the pageant as we were to do many times in the future. Since we both came to the task from active and successful theater and music careers, we sarcastically mused that this camp project would probably turn out to be on a high school level. I had also brought members of my professional theater company to the camp. I remember our collective arrogance. We all saw this as our spiritual work to be instruments to assist our teacher as best we could, and tried to put our professional standards aside. Well, in the end, the tables were turned. We learned an incredible lesson. Something happened in an atmosphere where everyone was doing deep inner work. Everyone was holding an inner concentration, while performing the outer drama and music that was magical and very inspiring. It had a life of its own. The atmosphere was not to be believed. Participants went through real transformational experiences before our eyes. In fact, we witnessed one of the most powerful pieces of theater that any of us had ever experienced as theater professionals or as audience.

With that experience, that moved me to my depth, the direction of my theater career changed. I wanted to know and understand and be able to recreate that kind of theater, that kind of process of creating original theater pieces with a spiritual purpose, that kind of attunement between a company of artists working together. I realized that I had perhaps received the greatest training through this process. It was to affect my professional and personal life in more meaningful ways than I could have possibly imagined.
People from all ethnic and religious backgrounds participated and offered this performance-ritual to audiences numbering in the thousands as their collective gift. As many as 350 people in each production were cast into roles that reflected and helped to develop some aspect of their essential soul nature. The purpose was to help the participants transform their limited sense of self to their essential self by role playing a character that represents that part of their higher or essential self. Everyone was given an inner concentration of a soul quality, their source of strength, (through a meditation practice) that helped develop the archetypal character of the prophet or angelic being that they were to portray for the audience. The rehearsal process was designed to help people embody, sing, dance and dramatize the character from the consciousness of the inner concentration. The influence of higher states of consciousness is woven into the drama of the transformational process of five major prophets as the history is dramatized in the parallel events and rituals of five of the major religions of the world.

This process influenced the development later of a fundamental principle of Omega Transpersonal Drama Therapy.—to help our clients and students to shift their sense of identity from a limited, conditioned, victim sense of self to their core soul or essential self that is deeper. Our experience working with drama therapists in training as well as clients has been to realize the power of seeing the people we work with, individuals, groups, families and even audiences for transformational theater, in their whole, healthy and balanced selves. We have learned how to help them connect in an authentic way with their essential wisdom self, who is always clear and balanced, maintaining the influence of higher states of consciousness.
When this theatrical challenge was offered, I had recently studied psychodrama with J.L and Zerka Moreno, the founders of psychodrama. I had also been fully involved in experiments in creating a new form of theater known as “environmental” theater, that broke down the barriers between actors and audience, by using an entire space which actors and audience shared in different ways. With young people, we went a step further in our experiment, creating a participatory form of theater, where our young audiences never sat down, but were given roles and became a part of the performance. By then, we had created two very successful participation plays for children. It was easy to see the long lasting educational and therapeutic effects on young people who participated in these theatrical experiences. We called this kind of theater, ‘Transformational Theater,’ not meaning change to become something different, but instead, meaning to uncover and recover who we really are. The participation plays we created and produced became living examples time after time of the transformative power of the embodied imaginal experience. So the evolution of the pageantry form as an embodied spiritual practice was a natural one. The large pageant processes re-enforced this and added the conscious intention of a spiritual practice to transform ourselves and the community through this theatrical ritual experience.

In order to encompass many dimensions of existence in THE COSMIC CELEBRATION, pageantry was chosen, an ancient form of theater. This large pageant form reflected ancient Greek Theater, where the plays served as healing and educational celebrations for the entire community. The earliest examples of pageantry were used for spiritual and initiatic purposes. Pageantry is a comprehensive theatrical form embracing music, dance and drama as well as narrative.
The word “pageant” was used in medieval times to refer to a moveable stage, which was carried from one village to another where different parts of the drama were enacted. In this way, the message was brought to many. Later the term was used to refer to much earlier mystery plays and rituals of the initiatic schools of different cultures.

(Pageantry, 1974)

- In ancient Egypt, “the Holy Play of Memphis” took the world of nature for its stage, the movements of the stars as living symbols and the drama of creation as its substance.
- In Tibet, mystery plays, for example, about a Boddhisattva becoming a Buddha through trials of self-sacrifice, were played out over a period of several weeks.
- In Greece, the mystery of Eleusis traced the suffering of God in manifestation through the dramas of Dionysis and Demeter.

Early forms of pageantry maintained a purity which relied on inner meaning and belief of participants to produce the experience of shattering and awe-inspiring glory that lead to transformation. Later, as the form was adapted by the royal courts to celebrate special occasions, pageantry began to rely on spectacle and material splendor for its effect, and its spiritual value declined.

According to Pir Vilayat, the pageant process can only succeed when theater ceases to be a spectacle and becomes a collective experience. All present discover themselves in each other because each identifies with his or her archetypal self rather than his or her finite self. Theater becomes, in the COSMIC CELEBRATION, a catalyst which promotes transformation in men and women and enables them to work more effectively toward building a better world.
This spiritual teacher had chosen the form of embodied meditation through an artistic medium, theater. In this way, he was able to help his students and larger audiences get in touch with a purpose in that unfoldment that empowers us to help create the kind of world we want to live in. It goes beyond our own lives to awaken us to what the planet is going through at this time and to prepare us to consciously participate in taking humanity to the next step in its evolution. Pir Vilayat continues:

_We have got to create a new world. And where are we going to create it except where creativity happens; that is in all the different forms of art, including drama of course, which is particularly pertinent because that’s where we are working with ourselves and are able to find our role in the great Cosmic Drama. Our role is not the role that we’re playing in our lives. It’s terribly inadequate in the case of most of us. So this is where we’re going to find it, to see that which we could be if we would be what we should be, in another, until such time as we are able to realize that it’s right in us. Theater is just that—a process of self discovery._

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan traveled throughout the world giving meditation seminars, participating in conferences, and guiding Sufi camps. He did that in the seventies and he continued to do that until his death in 2004. Often times he stayed in a different place every day or couple of days. In the spring of 1973, he was scheduled to speak in New York. I had a deep desire to speak with him personally there. However, it was difficult to get a private interview with him, since he gave lectures and initiations and met with people in large groups, all day long. If one person saw him privately, it means he wouldn’t be available to see many other people. However, I felt a strong desire and need to meet with him, and I suspected something deeper was going on.
When I got to New York, I was told that the only time he could see me was in the car on his way to the airport. I was delighted, and accepted the interview. In the car, we began to talk about the Parsifal pageant, “The Holy Grail,” which we had worked on together the previous summer at our meditation camp. That experience showed me the power of casting people into roles that reflect something of their souls’ essence. It resonated with the core of my being and purpose. In Sufism, the teacher tends the students like a gardener, bringing out the latent divine qualities in their souls through special meditation practices. At the camp, I had been very moved by some of the experiences people had with the inner concentrations they were given for their roles.

Seeing the power of peoples’ true beings, manifesting through their roles was the inspiration for a whole new kind of theater that we would develop in Boston. Here were the tools I was looking for. These could help us realize the vision for our theater that I had experienced a year earlier at the meditation camp, which involved translating the inner states we were experiencing into theatrical forms.

As we drove to the airport, I knew I hadn't come just on a whim. The inspiration for my meeting with Pir Vilayat was percolating since the first pageant we did together on the Holy Grail. It involved an experience I had at the Kotel (Wailing Wall) in Jerusalem. I had a powerful auditory vision of the three monotheistic religions co-existing in peace in Jerusalem, a place that has been the seat of more bloodshed in the name of religion than any place on the planet. I shared this vision with Pir Vilayat. He immediately responded positively about using that experience as the basis of a new theater process. He added that we should include material about the angelic planes, in creating a pageant about Jerusalem the next summer at our Woodstock meditation camp. He wanted the
participants and later the audience as well to experience a deep nostalgia--remembering what it was like in the heavens and connecting with the source from which the revelations came to each of the prophets of the different religions. The theater experience was to be a celebration of the essential unity underlying all religions and the human family.

Pir Vilayat has long said that Jerusalem is the heart chakra of the world and that when peace comes to Jerusalem the vibration will ripple out to the rest of the world. In light of the current crisis in the Middle East at the time, (which still continues), I sensed a new urgency. I felt guided and inspired to help create something tangible and of great beauty that would be a visual reminder to people of what is possible for humanity. This inspiration has continued in other theatrical forms. (See chapter on EARTHEART and MOTHERBLOOD: Experiments in Peace-Making).

The atmosphere in the car on the way to the airport became even more intense when I brought up “Hallelujah, The Three Rings.” This was a concentration on peace in the Middle East that Sam Lewis, founder of the Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, had introduced me to, at my first Sufi Camp. As Pir Vilayat again spoke about the seven planes of higher consciousness that he called the angelic spheres of light. I later learned that he had worked on a doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University in England on Angelology, the study of different mystical traditions’ cosmology of inner light. How glorious it would be, we thought, to create a theater piece that dramatized the splendor of the angelic celebrations in the heavens! I felt I glimpsed something of Pir Vilayat’s consciousness as he entered those celestial spheres, those higher states of consciousness and told me what they were like.
Right in the middle of developing this vision, I realized we were very near the airport! “I guess you’ll just have to get on the plane with him,” the driver joked. I answered, also joking, “Oh, of course!” A few minutes later I was writing a check to buy an airline ticket, not knowing if the check would bounce. All my things were in New York City; my boyfriend was expecting me in Boston. In that moment my schedule and other commitments were totally irrelevant. How often does one have the opportunity to fly into the heavens—in this case, via Chicago, which happened to be Pir Vilayat’s next stop?

In the next hour [or was it two], what an experience! I was awestruck as I felt that I was in the presence of a being who was tuning into the Divine intention: the will of the masters, saints and prophets of all times, who wanted a certain vision communicated to the world. Since I knew very little of what he was talking about, I felt it was my role to ask very mundane questions, so that I could try to translate this vision into theatrical forms. For example, I asked him, “There you are on the third plane of consciousness, can you tell me what it looks like? What color is it? What does it sound like? What does it feel like?” He would simply enter that consciousness and graciously answer my embarrassingly simplistic questions.

During that time, the scenario of what was to become THE COSMIC MASS and later to be called THE COSMIC CELEBRATION came through in its first form. That initial version included the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Later it would expand to include Buddhism and Hinduism. The theater experience was to be a celebration of the essential unity underlying all religions.
Suddenly, there we were in the Chicago airport. Pir Vilayat was making a connection to go on further and there I was alone, “transfigured and befuddled,” wondering what had happened.

THE COSMIC CELEBRATION evolved in each production. It has three dramatic dimensions---the historical prophets, the angelic beings of the celestial planes and a contemporary couple in today’s world. In the final version, the pageant was nurtured by the intuitive and eternal feminine spirit embodied in a women’s chorus.

It is based on the inner and universal meanings of the Catholic Mass, illustrated through the parallels drawn from the major religions of the world. The first dimension of THE CELEBRATION portrays the prophets of five of the world’s religions undergoing each of the stages of the Mass in their own lives. For example, the first stage is the Kyrie, which is about purification, preparation for prayer. Each religion has a ritual for this, using physical purification to symbolize the purification of our hearts, clearing our conscience in preparation for the next stage in our spiritual development.

The second dimension shows us the inner world. It depicts seven planes of higher consciousness, described in the Jewish Kabbalah, but paralleled in the mystical traditions of every religion. Music, color and dance recreate the experience of the inner light which all religions help us to remember.

The third dimension of THE CELEBRATION, which evolved later in the evolution of the script, is a story of a contemporary couple dealing with the challenges in today’s world. They dramatize the point that, like the prophets of the past, we are all growing, finding meaning in our lives and discovering our life’s purpose. These real life situations
help us to identify with journeys of the great ones of the past, whose lives can inspire us to believe that transformation is possible.

THE COSMIC CELEBRATION is made up of the following stages:

**Prologue:**
- Anticipating the Celebration
- Native American Invocation
- Procession of the Womens’ Chorus
- Mime: Introduction to the Cosmic Drama
- Birth of the Souls of Humanity
- Establishing a Connection with Their Angelic Inheritance

**Kyrie:**
- Symbolizing the Purification of Body and Heart Formalized in
  - the Jewish Mikvah Ceremony
  - the Muslim Wuzu (ablutions)
  - the Christian Baptism
  - the Buddhist Ablutions with Water From a Sacred Jar
  - the Hindu Bath Ritual at the Ganges

**Gloria:**
- Ezekiel’s Vision of the Opening of the Celestial Spheres:
  - Astral, Ginn, Galganim, Seraphim, Cherubim, Archangels, and the Four Hayoth
The Annunciation: Moments of Revelation—Visitation of angels and archangels
To Abraham, Mary, Mohammed, Shiva, Buddha

**Credo:**
Expression of Perfect Faith: “I believe”
Jewish: “Shema Yisroel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echod”
Buddhist: “Om Mani Padme Hum”
Muslim: “Ashadu La Ilaha Illa ‘Illa Hu”
Hindu: “Tat Twam Asi”
Christian: “Credo in Unum Deum”

**Sanctus:**
Higher Tests and Initiations of the Prophets
Mohammed Forgiving the Murderer of his Daughter
The Temptation of Jesus in the Desert
The Temptation of Buddha by Mara’s Daughters
Shiva’s self-immunization Against the Poison of the Snake
Isaiah’s Lips Scorched by the burning Coals of the Seraphim

**Hosanna:**
Celebrating the Coronation of the King
Dance of Rama and Sita
Recognition of Buddha as the Illuminated One
Initiation of Abraham by Melchizedik

Greeting of Christ with Hosannas Entering Jerusalem on a Donkey

Acceptance of Mohammed as a Prophet

**Offertory:**

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Buddha’s Renunciation of Family and Princely Life

Mohammed Courting Death Continuously

The Development of Shakti Energy in Shiva

The Sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham

The Crucifixion of Jesus

**Resurrexit:**

...and the Angel Said, “Time Will Be No More”

The Prophets, the great messengers, lead their followers to an ascent of the angelic planes. Hallelujah!

The Seven Steps Leading to the Vision of God

**Vision of the New Age:**

Religious Leaders/Prayer for Peace

Transformation of the Prophets

Communion with the Audience
And as the “messengers” ascend into higher states of consciousness, Pir Vilayat’s narration concludes: “May the message of God spread far and wide, illuminating and making the whole of humanity as one single family in the parenthood of God.”

In summary, the prophets modeled how each went through an ablution ritual in preparation for their revelation in the GLORIA. Out of the experience of a strong revelation they each had, they expressed their new level of faith through their CREDO or statement of belief. As soon as they (or now we) do that, they/we are tested and the SANCTUS was the test recorded in each of the scriptures. Once they/we pass the test there is a celebratory ovation in the heavens expressed through the HOSANNA. And then there is another level of test and challenge in the OFFERTORY, ending with the resurrection and rebirth in the RESURREXIT. In the last version, scenes were enacted between a contemporary couple, which reflected each stage as they were going through their own transformational process.

After our initial meditation camp production, I asked Pir Vilayat if he would like to create this as a public event. He enthusiastically answered yes. Our theater company had already applied for a grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities for that year. To start the energy moving, I applied for a second grant knowing that an arts organization is never awarded two grants. I thought that by applying this year, perhaps we would get money for the next year or the year after that. To our great surprise, we received an unprecedented two grants. The second one was for $1000 to produce this theatrical pageant. It was a small amount of money, but we took it as a strong sign that THE COSMIC CELEBRATION was meant to be produced in the world. It was to be the first of many such signs. From that time on, I found myself in awe of the
sacred mystery that seemed to surround each production, which would evolve over the next decade. Each production presented unique challenges and obstacles to overcome, which we called blessings in disguise. I felt privileged to be in the position to help bring this beautiful spiritual process and artistic jewel to tens of thousands of people and to work with thousands of people, who performed in it.

As I was quoted after our New York production, in an Associated Press article that circulated around the country:

‘What we try to do is to bring out the beauty, the validity and basic unity of all historic religions and the potential for doing good. The world has been through many periods of struggle, leaving it with a sense of paralysis and inadequacy, but now there’s an awakening of conscience, a possibility that we can see again the kernels for building life in a new way. It’s time to build a new vibration.”

I always felt without a doubt that Pir Vilayat's vision was meant to be expressed and never doubted that we would get the financial and other practical support to make it happen. And we did.

In each city, in our audition process, members from the larger spiritual community, including the full range of religious and spiritual paths, were drawn together, some to participate in a play, others in a spiritual ritual, others in a happening; Pir Vilayat would offer a talk about THE COSMIC CELEBRATION. All would feel a sense of something larger than any single person, beyond a project, reaching beyond the ordinary world of events. After the talk, we would cast people into roles of the prophets and their followers in five religion groups, angelic beings from the different planes of higher consciousness and in later productions, people in life, who would enact the stages of the Mass as they
played out in contemporary life. Besides the concentration of the individual roles, participants also took on a practice in spiritual architecture by becoming living temples. “This is not my body, this is the temple of God,” is a chant that was used as the celebrants shaped their bodies into different kinds of temples to represent the different faiths. There are no props in THE CELEBRATION, just a central stage structure that supports the people playing the angelic beings. Bodies become symbols through mudras or as parts of temple shapes and serve as backdrops for the action of the scenes.

Most participants were not trained actors; the rehearsal process became for all a spiritual practice, a surrendering to a larger purpose manifesting through us. All participants, even those working on publicity, set and costume design, technical support, fund raising and other aspects of production, were given inner concentrations or sacred phrases to maintain through the work. The inner concentrations were also meant to transmit to a general audience the vibrations of the corresponding inner states to the outer drama, creating a sacred atmosphere supported by a fabric of dramatic musical and visual imagery. When it was produced professionally, we raised over two hundred thousand dollars for the expenses in different productions. Participants donated their services in the spirit of the message of unifying the human family and the transformational process we were all involved in.

Each city’s production had its unique flavor and extraordinary features. Some highlights from the major productions include:

(1) In Woodstock, N.Y., 1973, everyone in attendance at the summer Sufi camp participated in the pageant experience. There was no audience. In the middle of the production, during the Kyrie, when each prophet from the different religions performed
their ablution rites, it suddenly began to storm and then hail. We wondered how this could happen in the summer. We had to turn the microphones off, which meant that no one could be heard. But everyone tuned to another level and continued through the rain and hail storm. We were all taken through a true ablution ritual for ourselves and this process.

(2) In San Francisco, 1974, eight hundred people showed up at the audition. In Berkeley, we did three performances, the last one was at midnight - a Cosmic Midnight Mass. Jerry Brown, then Governor of California, graced us with his presence at the midnight performance. The Grateful Dead performed with The Sufi Choir, to do a benefit for the production.

(3) In Los Angeles, 1975, we performed where the Academy Awards were held - the Santa Monica Civic Center. In that production, our costumes were made in a Hollywood costume shop and our angelic planes were made up of many famous actresses who played their anonymous roles graciously.

(4) In Boston, 1974, we performed in the newly opened 'Cyclorama' of the Boston Center for the arts - a huge high domed round space where we created a 360° theater in the round experience with 350 people in the production. This space was originally built to house a huge Civil War painting and had recently been renovated from being the home of the Boston Flower Market.

Several years later, 1977, we performed to thousands of people in Boston's Armory.

(5) In London, in St. James’s Church, Picadilly 1982, we were honored to have the BBC choir working with us. In this very formal church with an audience of many senior
citizens, I was astounded to see them joyously standing up and dancing at the end, in their formal pews, as other younger, new-age audiences had done elsewhere.

(6) In Chamonix, France, 1975, we performed outside, high up in the mountains to an audience from the town, below our mountain retreat site. The prophets performed their ablution rites in the mountain stream and the angelic beings resided and danced on the mountain side.

(7) In New York, in St. John Cathedral, 1975, the second largest cathedral in the world, perhaps became a pivotal performance, performed for many thousands of people. It was the culminating performance of an Arts week that ushered in a significant event at the U.N., sponsored by The Temple of Understanding, where authentic spiritual teachers formally addressed the UN delegates for the first time. It was called the World Spiritual Summit Conference V: “One Is The Human Spirit.” It was set up to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the United Nations. And notably, it was the first time that Mother Theresa came to this country and the first time that Native American elders had been invited to address the U.N. delegates. Rev. James P. Morton, dean of St. John cathedral, said: “My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one, but we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we already are.” Pir Vilayat: “The U.N. is beginning to see the importance of coming together religiously to solve its problems. In recent times, it has lost sight of its original inspiration of one humanity, but there now seems to be a renewed awareness that we need a spiritual backbone. Political leaders feel a kind of bankruptcy and despair and have become aware of the need for spiritual unity.”

(8) Smaller productions in Massachusetts and California between 1979--1982
(9) The last major performance brought us back to the Boston area, 1983, this time in Harvard University's Sander's Theater, in Cambridge. In this smaller production, we used recorded music and developed new scenes for the people in life. One contemporary couple enacted relevant present day scenes that represented each stage of the 'Mass.' We hoped to effectively speak to today's audience as we made the point that we must be the prophets in today's world, inspired by the prophets of the past.

As THE COSMIC CELEBRATION evolved, we brought in the awakening feminine consciousness into THE CELEBRATION. In the first production, God was portrayed sitting high up with a veiled feminine presence sitting below him. We felt that we shouldn’t attempt to portray the “great spirit” in anyway physically and certainly not to portray the feminine face of God that way. The early productions had male prophets with whole religion groups of followers. By the final production, we had a male prophet and his female counterpart portrayed equally. Abraham and Sarah; Shiva and Shakti, Buddha and Yashodara, Ali (Mohammed couldn’t be portrayed) and Khadija, Christ and Mary. In the last production, we had a young married couple, equally exploring deeper issues in their lives and and a womens’ chorus that surrounded the action with their nurturing sound and movement.

There was a lot of press about THE COSMIC MASS/THE COSMIC CELEBRATION, in all of the places we performed.

A couple of the earliest examples:

After the first public performance in 1974, The East West Journal wrote:
“Living theater came to Boston on March 23rd with so much love and energy that theatre may never be the same. THE COSMIC MASS transcended all traditional stage concepts, creating an electrical event that swept a sympathetic audience of its intellectual de riguer and into a spiraling circle of ascending energy.

“THE COSMIC MASS was a living enactment of myth, an archetypal magnification of the love that we all share and feel but seldom dare to express. It is a rare theatrical event that is able to so beautifully compress the whole History of man’s evolution into 50 timeless minutes. “

Brooklyn Heights Press: “Here was a theatre of spiritual love on a vast scale…THE COSMIC MASS may point the way to a radical new sacramentalism in the theatre (and in society). ….One feels that the theatre may be groping …towards some deep beginnings towards some deep renewal and redefinition.

At the end of Florence Falk’s article in ANIMA: THE COSMIC MASS: Reflections on a Spiritual Theatre, she challenges us, as Creators:

*Spiritual theater is just beginning to be born. Just as we must forge new myths to live by, so we must we create new theatre forms to manifest them. Imagine the creators of the COSMIC MASS gathering together small communities of actor-devotees and creating performance situations that involve actors and audience as participants. Working within these smaller “magic circles” the devotees create larger and larger circles so that the Message-and drama- may be authentically shared by more and more centers of energy. (1972, pp 40-52)*

Thanks to all of the many people here and in Europe who helped to make THE COSMIC CELEBRATION come alive.
THE COSMIC CELEBRATION: Ritual Theater As Spiritual Awakening

For more information about Omega Theater, its productions and training programs in Transpersonal Drama Therapy and Psychodrama:

www.omegatheater.org

References


Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1973-1983). COSMIC CELEBRATION. (production) Originally THE COSMIC MASS, S. Linden, director; A. Mathieu, musical director, Omega Theater, Boston

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