

When it comes to word association, which of the following is most often connected to “religious”—“intolerance” or “harmony”? If you chose the former, you’re technically (if somewhat gloomily) correct, but consider yourself a spiritual optimist if you went for the latter. Granted, it’s true that we live in a culturally and spiritually diverse world, where a single misspoken word or phrase can far too often lead to confusion, anger or even violence. But for all the religious differences that continue to fracture our global village, there is one universal aspect all faiths share: sound. Whether hymns, chants, songs of prayer or simple, repeated meditative tones, there is a sound to spirituality that’s easily recognized—if you take the time to listen. Just ask Nancy Watters.

art & activism

Singing the Sacred

Nancy Watters knows the sound of one heart healing

By JOHN THRELFALL



Watters is a Cowichan Bay-based teacher, counsellor and psychotherapist who has spent the past decade developing Sacred World Song, a participatory aural workshop incorporating songs, chants, mantras and meditations from a variety of world faiths, all of which share a basic desire to “activate the noble qualities of humanity.” Sound grandiose? Watters says it’s actually quite simple.

“It’s all about bringing people together with sacred chants and world songs that are easy to learn and beautiful to sing,” she explains. “It’s really about healing, on an individual and community level. The human voice is one of the most therapeutic healing instruments there is, and all of the world religions have traditions of sacred singing or sacred sound. Often, sound is talked about as being the origin of all creation—the word of god, say, or the sound of ‘ohm’—so when we’re learning these sacred songs, we’re tuning ourselves up to the universe.”

Watters has spent the past decade traveling North America and learning sacred sounds first-hand from a variety of religious practitioners: Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Baha’i, Jewish, Taize Christian, first nations . . . her Sacred World Song list is longer than you’d expect.

“Part of this project is learning to honour each other around religious issues,” Watters continues, “to not throw out religion but to discover the common ground we can all honour. I think people are thirsty for spiritual experiences and, as far as I can see, what I’m doing is unique, in that I’m being really inclusive of all these faith traditions. And people

have the opportunity to experience that in these workshops—precisely because it is a feeling, emotional thing.”

Watters, who has trained with the likes of Anne Mortifee and the Gettin’ Higher Choir’s Shivon Robinsong and Denis Donnelly, says she came to develop Sacred World Song because, “I just needed it for myself.” And while she can say that with a chuckle today, it’s clear the personal issues which spurred her on 17 years ago—including a divorce and subsequent health problems—were no laughing matter.

“I really enjoyed singing when I was a kid,” she recalls, “yet I couldn’t sing for a long time after that.” It was after she had children of her own that Watters started singing more, and even more when she started her healing process after her divorce. “Now,” she says, “it’s really my passion. I resisted it for a long time then finally said, ‘Take me, I’m yours!’”

This Sunday’s three-hour workshop is only the latest of many Sacred World Song workshops Watters has brought to Victoria, but you certainly don’t have to be either religious or a trained singer to enjoy the experience.

“It’s less about singing and more about the enjoyment of your voice,” she explains, “as well as discovering how fun it is to sing together in community—which we really don’t do enough.” (But don’t worry if you’re not up to *Canadian Idol* standards: Watters says she welcomes everyone from trained opera singers to “wounded singers”—people who just stopped after they were told as children they couldn’t sing.) And while this isn’t a healing ritual per se, Watters says healing is definitely one of the side benefits. “When the group gets going, you’ll feel the vibrations in your body—that’s part of the healing and centering joy of it, too.”

And has she ever encountered any concerns about mixing the sounds of different faiths into one “greatest hits” style package? “I try to and be as authentic to those traditions as I can,” Watters explains. “Like any good anthropologist or musicologist, I always ask about the appropriateness of using these songs in the way that I do. But of course, in each tradition, they have varying ideas of what’s appropriate or not—and every time I have a workshop I learn something more, because inevitably somebody is there from one of these traditions.”

She tells about learning a specific Jewish chant at Vancouver’s Sacred World Music Festival, which she subsequently used at a Sacred World Song workshop here in Victoria. “A woman came up to me and said, ‘We don’t sing the name Yaweh outside of a real synagogue service, because it’s considered profane.’ So I asked her what to put there instead, and she gave me a substitute word for the name of god and I’ve taught it that way ever since.”

Watters also notes how important it is to literally set the right tone for each group. “If you have too many Sanskrit or Latin chants, for example, people get tired—you get too in-your-head with a foreign language, and can’t relax into it,” she says, explaining that sacred songs tend to fall into either “very serene, relaxed” or “really lively, ecstatic” categories. “But over the past 10 years, I’ve learned a lot about how to create an experience for people that’s joyful and uplifting, but also creates balance.”

Now, you can’t help but like the sound of that. **M**

Sacred World Song runs from 2-5 p.m. Sunday, April 2, at the Victoria Conservatory of Music’s Wood Hall. Tickets are \$40 and participants are asked to pre-register at 1-866-386-0253 or www.nancywatters.com.

The BEST of the Vancouver Jewish Film Festival at the ROXY Cinegog 2657 Quadra (& Hillside) 382-3370

Where Movies are a Religion



FRI March 31

FREE ZONE 7:15 PM

Israel 2005, Director: Amos Gitai
Hebrew and English w/English subtitles
Rebecca (Natalie Portman), an American who has been living in Jerusalem for a few months now, has just broken off her engagement. She gets into a cab driven by Hanna, an Israeli. But Hanna is on her way to Jordan, to the Free Zone, to pick up a large sum of money that “the American”, her husband’s partner, owes them. Rebecca persuades Hanna to take her along. When they reach the Free Zone, Leila, a Palestinian, explains that the American isn’t there and that the money has vanished. . . . Amos Gitai’s new film also stars Hanna Laslo (who won best actress at Cannes for this role) as Hannah and Hiam Abbass (from last year’s *The Syrian Bride*) as Leila. **Free Zone** is a subtly powerful film about the tensions that develop between the women, reflecting the struggles of the region, as they search for common ground. 90 min.

SARAH SILVERMAN - JESUS IS MAGIC 9 PM

USA 2005, Director: Liam Lynch
An established name on the comedy circuit and a rising star in motion pictures and television, the incendiary and adorable comedic dynamo Sarah Silverman brings her mordantly funny and unflinchingly wise off-Broadway, one-woman show *Jesus is Magic* to the big screen, introducing new fans to what Silverman’s already vast fan base has known all along - that she is among the most gifted and riotous names in comedy. The feature-film version of *Jesus is Magic* arrives in the wake of a successful sold out stage runs in New York and Los Angeles. Nothing is sacred or against the rules in Silverman’s sharp, frequently shocking but always astute comedic oeuvre and she touches on ethnicity, sexuality and race as well as AIDS, the Holocaust and the events of September 11th. Not for the easily offended, Sarah Silverman makes Lenny Bruce sound like a boy scout. 71 min.

Warning: Coarse language and coarse humour.

\$6 Kids & Seniors

\$8 Adults

\$70 Festival Pass

Festival Screening

Membership Card Required \$1.00

SAT April 1

ISN'T THIS A TIME 7:15 PM

USA 2005, Director: Jim Brown
A musical tribute to music impresario Harold Levanthal, *Isn't This a Time* captures a magical evening that took place at Carnegie Hall in 2003 to celebrate the accomplishments of a man well known and loved by the American folk community. More than twenty years after their farewell concert, the Weavers (now in their 70s and 80s) Pete Seeger, Fred Hellerman, Ronnie Gilbert and Erik Darling, joined by Peter, Paul and Mary, Theodore Bikel, Leon Bibb, Arlo Guthrie, Sarah Lee Guthrie and Tao Rodriguez-Seeger came together again to perform at this rousing tribute concert. This is a family of artists who were never stymied by hardship, censorship or even generation gaps - who join together to bring us an intoxicating, heart-stirring brew of American history, political chronicles and powerful music. 90 min.

USHPIZIN 9 PM

2004 Israel, Director: Gidi Dar
Hebrew and Yiddish w/English subtitles
Moshe (Shuli Rand) and Mali (Michal Bat-Sheva Rand), a poor and childless Orthodox couple, find themselves penniless on the eve of the Jewish holy day of Succoth. They pray for assistance from the Lord and the impossible happens. Moshe and Mali are the beneficiaries of an unexpected charitable donation. God has taken pity on them, or so it seems, until two escaped convicts show up on their doorstep. Worried the visitors may be messengers of God, the couple follow the custom of receiving guests for the holy day and extend their hospitality. They soon learn God works in mysterious ways as their faith is put to the ultimate test when the convicts bring chaos into their gentle community. Offering an authentic and unique look at the inside of the Orthodox Jewish world, *Ushpizin* is a heart-warming and humorous drama exploring the powers of faith. 90 min.

TROPIC OF VENUS 10:45 PM

Israel 2005, Director: Gur Bentchiv
A fast-paced drama about a good-looking star whose charmed life spirals out of control after a friend’s death and a blind date catapults him between a dangerous love triangle and a murder investigation. 148 min.

Warning: Mature Subject Matter suitable for Adult Audiences

SUN April 2

ROUND TRIP 7:15 PM

Israel 2005, Director: Shahar Rozen
Hebrew w/English subtitles

The story centers on Nurit (touchingly played by Israeli actress Anat Waxman), a working-class woman who supports her husband and two young children by driving a bus in their small Israeli town. Tired of both her loveless marriage and her dead-end job, Nurit leaves her husband to begin life anew with her children in Tel Aviv. However, the promise of a fulfilling new life is quickly shattered by the demands of balancing both work and single parenthood in the big city. At the suggestion of a co-worker, Nurit reluctantly seeks household help. Mushi (South African actress Nthathi Moshesh), a beautiful Ghanaian immigrant, offers her services as a nanny in exchange for room and board. Quickly enough, Mushi’s gentle, understanding, and nurturing ways help to transform this distressed family, and much to Nurit’s surprise, a caring friendship soon evolves into a tender romance. **Winner of the Best International Feature award at the Torino Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.** 95 min.

ODESSA ODESSA 9 PM

France/Israel 2004, Director: Michale Boganim
English, Russian and Yiddish with English subtitles

Beginning in the Ukrainian metropolis on the Black Sea, this beautiful documentary discovers the remnants of the once thriving Odessa Jewish community and follows it into “exile” amidst the environs of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn and Ashdod. These former Odessans long for a sense of a belonging that cannot be replicated in their adopted homes despite the cohesive “little Odessans” in which they dwell. While their children adapt to their new homes more easily, the émigrés pine for a paradise lost even as they confess that perhaps it never existed at all. “In Odessa we were Jews, here we are Russians,” says one of them, lamenting the exile’s dilemma. The gorgeous cinematography helps to convey the beauty and longing of these changed lives. 96 min.

We gratefully acknowledge the donation of the screenings of *Odessa Odessa* by Alliance Francais

MON April 3

PROTOCOLS OF ZION 7:15 PM

USA 2004, Director: Marc Levin

Marc Levin gives us an explosive exploration of resurgent anti-Semitism in the wake of September 11th. Levin’s film draws its inspiration from an encounter he had with a cab driver not long after 9/11 in which the driver, an Egyptian immigrant, made the disturbing claim that Jews had been warned not to go to work at the World Trade Centre on the day of the attack. He then said “It’s all written in the book,” referring to “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” a notorious forgery created 100 years ago purporting to be the Jews’ master plan to rule the world. Long ago, discredited as a fake, “The Protocols” was a crucial influence on Hitler and has fueled hatred, violence and ultimately genocide through the first half of the 20th century. 93 min.

MOSHE SAFDIE: THE POWER OF ARCHITECTURE 9 PM

Canada 2004, Director: Donald Winkler

This portrait of world-renowned Canadian Israeli born architect Moshe Safdie now based in Boston, depicts his years in Haifa and Montreal and his life-altering travels as apprentice to Louis Kahn, while presenting both his recent and most famous and familiar creations. 91 min.

TUE April 4

PAPERCLIPS 7:15 PM

USA 2004, Director: Elliot Berlin
English and German w/English subtitles

This is a moving and inspiring documentary film that captures how the students of Whitwell, TN, a small, rural and almost exclusively white and Christian community, responded to the principal’s desire to teach a lesson about the Holocaust. The project got underway with a promise to honor every lost soul by collecting one paper clip for each individual exterminated by the Nazis. Despite the fact that they had previously been unaware of the Holocaust, their dedication was absolute. Their plan was simple but profound. The amazing result, a memorial railcar filled with 11 million paper clips (representing 6 million Jews and 5 million gypsies, homosexuals and other victims of the Holocaust) which stands permanently in their schoolyard, is an unforgettable lesson of how a committed group of children and educators can change the world one classroom at a time. 82 min.

EDWARD G. ULMER - THE MAN OFF SCREEN 9 PM

USA 2005, Director Michael Palm

Edgar G. Ulmer emigrated from Austria and worked on the fringes of Hollywood, where he was named “King of the B’s”. Forgotten and rediscovered, he became a legendary cult figure to film aficionados and “new wave” filmmakers. **Edgar G. Ulmer - The Man Off Screen** is the first movie about the director of such B-movie classics as *The Black Cat* and *Detour*. Pieced together like a detective story, it is a dazzling picture of Ulmer’s mysterious and moving life and work, a journey through the strange world of B-movies. 77 min.

WED April 5

WATERMARKS 7:15 PM

Israel/France/USA, 2004, Director: Yaron Zilberman

In the 1930s the women of Hakoah, a legendary Jewish swim club, dominated competitions in Austria. When the Nazis shut down the club the swimmers realizing their impending fate fled the country. Sixty-five years later the women’s swim team is reunited in their old swimming pool in Vienna. Told by the swimmers, now in their eighties, **Watermarks** is about a group of young girls with a passion to be the best. 80 min.

BOYS OF BUCHENWALD 9 PM

Canada 2002, Director: Audrey Mehler

Almost 60 years after their liberation from Buchenwald, the “boys” meet again. A remarkable bond between three orphaned Jewish boys who survive the Buchenwald concentration camp remains undiminished by the passing of decades. 60 min.

We gratefully acknowledge the donation of the screening of *Boys of Buchenwald* by Papery Films

Preceded by

FROM PHILADELPHIA TO THE FRONT

USA 2005, Directors: Marianne Bernstein and Judy Gelles

The experiences of six Jewish veterans from Philadelphia, for whom the war to defeat Hitler had deeply personal significance, are told here in a documentary that includes archival footage and newsreels. 37 min.

THUR April 6

39 POUNDS OF LOVE 7:15 PM

USA 2005, Director: Dani Menkin
English, Hebrew & Spanish w/ subtitles

Part love story, part road trip movie, **39 Pounds of Love** is the poignant and inspiring story of Ami Ankilewitz, an extraordinary Israeli man who redefines the word “survivor.” Diagnosed with a dangerous and severe form of muscular dystrophy, doctors predicted he wouldn’t live past six years of age. Now 34-years-old, weighing a shocking 39 pounds, and paralyzed except for one finger, Ami defies his extreme physical limitations to carry on a life of vitality in Tel Aviv working from his wheelchair as a computer animator. Ami travels to the United States, where he was born, for a cross-country road trip with friends to confront the doctor who predicted his early demise and to fulfill his lifelong dream of riding a Harley Davidson. Unflinching and inspirational as Ami himself, **39 Pounds of Love** is a portrait of sheer determination like nothing seen onscreen before. Winner of the 2005 Israeli Ophir Award for Best Documentary Film. 70 min.

ASAF SHAUL, Ami’s former care worker and best friend will attend and sit on a **PANEL DISCUSSION** following the screening

Co-presented by Jewish Family Service Agency and sponsored by The Canada-Israel Committee



GO FOR ZUCKER 9:15 PM

Germany 2004, Director: Dani Levy
German w/English subtitles

From the producers of *Run Lola Run* and *Goodbye Lenin!* comes the first German-Jewish comedy made in Germany since WWII. A film about a comically dysfunctional Jewish family, **Go for Zucker** is about two estranged brothers - one a hard-living former East German celebrity sportscaster now very much down-on-his-luck, and the other, his quasi-Orthodox brother from the West. They are awkwardly reunited when they learn that in order to share their mother’s inheritance they will need to reconcile before burying her according to Jewish custom in her native East Germany. 91 min.

