



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

*LOVE OF GOD & LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR, OR
LOVE OF THE GOOD & LOVE OF THE NEIGHBOUR.*

Annual UN Observance Weeks Feb. 1-7

Sounds of Faith Children's Interfaith Concert

4:00 o'clock pm, Sunday, 28 January 2018

The Raue Center for the Arts, Crystal Lake, Illinois USA



Sponsored by FaithBridge and Harran Productions Foundation

More than 170 children from across the Chicago metropolitan area and from many faith communities gathered at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake, Illinois, a NW Chicago suburb, to make music together. The all-day interfaith encounter occurred on Sunday, January 28, 2018, under the guidance of guest composer and conductor Lee Kesselman and individual conductors of differing faith communities. The resulting public concert explicitly embraced four faith traditions – Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Christian. Included with this report is a video documentary of 14+ minutes ([DOCUMENTARY LINK](#)), a shorter “trailer” of 4+ minutes especially for use in social media ([TRAILER LINK](#)), and a video recording of the entire public concert. ([FULL CONCERT](#)).

Planning for this event began in February 2015, when FaithBridge and Harran Productions Foundation decided to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week together. We previously shared a very successful adult version of *Sounds of Faith* in November 2012. That concert embraced the sounds of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Now we wanted to expand beyond the Abrahamic traditions and also to focus entirely on children. Planning included identifying and recruiting ensembles from various faith traditions, budget-development and fund-raising, scheduling, publicity, finding an appropriate venue, and staffing the event.

The five groups that eventually were chosen were well-known to the planners for the quality of their programs. Each group was given a generous honorarium for their participation, as were



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their directors. We helped to cover their transportation costs, provided a lunch, and sent every group copies of the sheet music for the two compositions they would sing together.

The public concert began with the “signature” opening of church bells ringing, muezzins calling the adhan, and rabbis blowing shofars - all inviting the audience into a space of prayer, recitation, chant, dance and singing. Each group then presented sacred sounds and movements from its own faith traditions under its own director. Finally, all groups sang together two pieces. *Now I Walk in Beauty* is a composition by Greg Smith based on a Navajo (Native American) text, and *Peace in the Desert* is an original composition by guest composer and conductor, Lee Kesselman. The latter piece required not just musical but also linguistic learning. All the participants sang this piece in four languages – English, Arabic, Latin and Hebrew.

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:2-4)

Each group rehearsed this music separately for many weeks before they came together. You can see in the videos that the entire performance was of a very high quality. It was enthusiastically received by a large audience. The children and youth came to know one another and cheered one another in their respective endeavors. Many people said that America needs more events like this to bring us together.

While the audience was rightfully ecstatic about the children on stage, the planners were aware of children who were not present. Determined efforts had been made to recruit a Native American ensemble, a Roman Catholic liturgical choir, a Hispanic choir, and a Buddhist or Buddhist-related ensemble. A very fine American Indian drumming and dancing team from the American Indian Center accepted our invitation but canceled when they lost their principal drummer. Our search for a replacement group included Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota, but without success. We are saddened by this because the voices and presence of Native Americans and First Nations people need to be incorporated into every interfaith setting, yet they often are most overlooked. Similarly, a very fine Spanish-language youth choir associated with a magnet

The humanitarian spirit of peace and hope was embodied by a courageous young man, Aboud. Together with his family, Aboud had fled the total devastation of civil war in Aleppo, Syria, and was grateful to find refuge in Jordan several years ago. Most of his extended family, including his father, perished in the fighting. Aboud and his family had lived several months in the bombed-out ruins of his Aleppo home. His family (mother, two daughters and two sons) arrived in Chicago on the eve of a political convention that, only a few months later, resulted in a total immigration ban from his native Syria. They continue to be sponsored by a local congregation.



When Aboud heard about the concert, he wanted to sing too. Although personally unknown to them, the Nasheed Club invited him to join them. He had one week to prepare. But not only did he sing publicly for the first time in his life; more importantly, he made many new friends. His contribution to the joyful, hopeful energy of the concert won the hearts of the audience and made his mother and family very proud.



school in the Chicago Public School system was identified; sadly, it had disbanded prior to our contact with them. It is our goal to include these and other groups in our next endeavor.

Given tensions in the USA today, we were concerned about the events security. FaithBridge has worked at building good relations with the local police departments and welcome them as guests to our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Interfaith Prayer Breakfast. For the concert we arranged a low-key but visible police presence, and we insisted that the department send its most culturally

sensitive officers. Inside the hall several board members were constantly alert to potential problems of which, thankfully, none arose.

From Our Mission Statements

FaithBridge works to promote interfaith understanding and community through education and shared action. It brings together people of many faith traditions to learn and serve, to find common ground and to celebrate diversity.

Harran Productions Foundation provides a framework to unite diverse communities of faith and cultural traditions. It aims to produce inclusive educational events and programs that build hope and energize people of all backgrounds to work together. It believes that by respectfully exploring various traditions, our comfort level with each other can grow, and our coexistence can be enriched. It is committed to producing high-quality educational materials for use in classrooms, community centers and places of worship.

To provide each ensemble the benefits listed above, and to rent the theatre and provide production staff, required the generous support of corporate sponsors, individual donors and volunteers. We found that people were eager to support this effort to the limit of their abilities, enabling us to cover all expenses.

The planners were deeply moved by the thoughtful letters of support from leaders of Chicago’s most prominent faith communities: The Parliament of the World Religions, the Council of American Islamic Organizations, The United Church of Christ, The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, Hands of Peace, The Chicago Board of Rabbis, The Buddhist Council of the Midwest, The Niagara Foundation, The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago and the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago. We are including them in this report; download them at [\(LETTERS\)](#).

We are applying for the World Interfaith Harmony Week award for several reasons. First, all our faith traditions value children. We want the world – not just Chicago - to experience faith as expressed in their joyful song, recitation, chant and movement. Second, our country currently is engaged in a desperate struggle with bigotry, violence and hatred. We believe events such as this facilitate unity and healing. Third, we plan to share the financial reward and prestige with each participating ensemble. Fourth, we want to invest not just in individual groups, but in future interfaith endeavors such as this one. Fifth, the international recognition of such an award will generate more interest in and enthusiasm for interfaith endeavors across the USA.

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In addition to abundant praise from parents and community members, FaithBridge has received overtures from other community institutions to offer similar concerts in their venues. Needless to say, funding for such an expansion would be greatly enhanced by a *World Interfaith Harmony Week* prize!

From 2015 until now, our work on this project has been a genuine journey in faith. Though of differing traditions, we collectively believe we were responding to a *calling*, that our effort was *blessed*, and that “*a hand above our shoulder*” encouraged and guided us on our way. It was a great privilege to midwife such an awesome event, and to have our own faith strengthened by the witness of youth and children. We are grateful to the United Nations for its support, and especially to the World Interfaith Harmony Week organizers, for encouraging this celebration around the world.

Respectfully submitted,

Gilbert R. Friend-Jones

Executive Director

FaithBridge

www.faithbridgeinterfaith.org

Shakeela Hassan

Founder and Executive Producer

Harran Productions Foundation

www.harranfoundation.org

Suzanne Martinez

President

FaithBridge

www.faithbridgeinterfaith.org

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