



Children's voices will rise in faith and harmony during a concert nearly two years in the making.

FaithBridge and the Harran Productions Foundation will celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week with a 4 p.m. concert Jan. 28 at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake. More than 170 area children will gather for a day of interfaith music and dance, with the event culminating in a public "Sounds of Faith" concert.

"Sounds of Faith" will feature local children's ensembles representing various faith and ethnic traditions, including song, dance, recitation and chant from Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Hindu traditions, said event coordinator, Rev. Gilbert "Budd" Friend-Jones, who lives in Sarasota, Fla.

The idea of the concert, from the Harran Productions Foundation, is to let go of every notion you have about someone else's beliefs and just to share the sounds of your faith — not the beliefs and the doctrines, he said.

"So you get music and chant and drumming and shofars — you get those things instead of talking heads," he said.

The ensembles will join together to perform "Peace in the Desert," composed and conducted by Lee Kesselman, an instructor at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn; and a Navajo text set to music called "Now I Walk in Beauty." These will close the program.

Friend-Jones put together a "Sounds of Faith" concert several years ago and wanted another go around — this time with kids.

"I felt these events are always adults talking to adults. I felt it was important to get children involved — sharing their faith, the sounds of their faith and learning from each other and hearing each other," Friend-Jones said. "There's a signature opening for the 'Sounds of Faith' concerts — it's really moving — it begins with the azan, the call to prayer in Islamic tradition ... and then you begin to hear the shofars blowing, and then you'll begin to hear the bells chiming, the Christian tradition, and Hindu chanting. So all of that is going on from different parts of the theater and the audience is enveloped in sound of different calls to prayer. It's really quite dramatic and beautiful."

He hopes that people who attend the concert walk away with a sense of the preciousness of children of all faiths and ethnicities and their traditions, he said, as well as "their vulnerability and their beauty and their ability to teach adults as well as learn from adults."

Music director of the "Sounds of Faith" concert is Steve Szalaj, who is also the artistic director of the Voices in Harmony community choir in Crystal Lake, an adjunct instructor of voice at McHenry County College and an adjunct instructor in music education at Judson University in Elgin. He was in charge of putting the program together.

"I have worked with Budd and FaithBridge and the Harran Foundation before putting on a "Sounds of Faith" event that was focused on adults," he said. "Budd asked me to be involved with the project, which focused on youth ensembles. We've been working on this almost two years now."

One of the groups performing is a choir from the Islamic Foundation School in Villa Park. They will perform a nasheed, he said, which is a sacred song that is part of the Islamic tradition.

There will be a dance ensemble from the Indian Dance School in Schaumburg doing Indian sacred dance, he said.

The Campanella Children's Choir from Wheeling will sing sacred repertoire, he said, and a group from the Chicago Children's Choir will share some Jewish repertoire.

"Then we have a group from Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. The groups are called Little Warriors for Christ and Imani Ya Watume Choir, which are their middle school and high school choirs," Szalaj said. "They will be singing some gospel repertoire. So it's quite diverse in its musical and dance offerings."

Kesselman's "Peace in the Desert" is music that has English, Arabic, Latin and Hebrew text.

"It's about the three faiths that are located in that area of the world. We've been talking about that a lot because of Jerusalem lately. This is a text from Isaiah where they are blending those three languages together into one song," he said. "It's a pretty remarkable piece of music and Lee himself is going to be conducting that piece."

Szalaj thinks audiences will enjoy the variety of worship music, sounds and dance on the program.

"Secondly, if they're interested in learning about other cultures, they'll get a sampling of other cultures by listening to what's going on in the performances," he said. "The participants themselves will get to work with each other and get to know each other. It's just coming together and being able to share that time together will help breed understanding between people. Which is something we really need in our world today. We need not fear somebody who is different than us or who have a different faith than us. It's about living together in our world."

Annie Alleman is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.

Jan. 28 concert at Crystal Lake Raue to celebrate Interfaith Harmony Week

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CRYSTAL LAKE – FaithBridge and the Harran Productions Foundation will celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week Jan. 28 at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake.

More than 150 children from various faith communities will gather for a day of interfaith music and dance, with the event culminating in a public “Sounds of Faith” concert at 4 p.m.

“Sounds of Faith” will bring together some of the best children’s ensembles to represent various faith and ethnic traditions from throughout the Chicago area. Each ensemble will share sacred sounds and songs of their traditions.

The public concert will feature song, dance, recitation and chant from Islamic, Jewish, Christian and Hindu traditions. The participating ensembles also will join together to perform the shared anthem, “Peace in the Desert,” composed and conducted by well-known composer Lee Kesselman, and “Gate, Gate,” a Buddhist chant composed by Brian Tate.

Endorsed by the Parliament for World Religions, “Sounds of Faith” will inaugurate local celebrations of World Interfaith Harmony Week, which officially begins Jan. 27.

Sponsored by the United Nations, World Interfaith Harmony Week seeks to spread the message of harmony and tolerance among the followers of all of the world’s religions, faiths and beliefs.

King Abdullah II of Jordan, who first proposed the idea for World Interfaith Harmony Week, offers three prizes to be awarded to each of the three best events or texts organized in honor of the week. Awarded based on how well they promote the goals of the initiative, prizes include \$25,000 and a gold medal for first place, \$15,000 and a silver medal for second place and \$5,000 and a bronze medal for third place. No American event has ever won a prize.

If “Sounds of Faith” is named among the three events most successful in promoting interfaith harmony and impacting religious understanding, a local representative will travel to Jordan for a ceremony to receive the prize.

The prize will be split between FaithBridge, the Harran Productions Foundation and each of the participating ensembles.

“Raue Center is proud to be inclusive of all faiths and all people,” Raue Center Executive Director Richard Kuranda said. “I truly hope the event captures the attention of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The arts are inclusive of all.”

Tickets to “Sounds of Faith” cost \$15 and can be bought at www.faithbridgeinterfaith.org. A link also can be found at www.rauecenter.org under upcoming events.