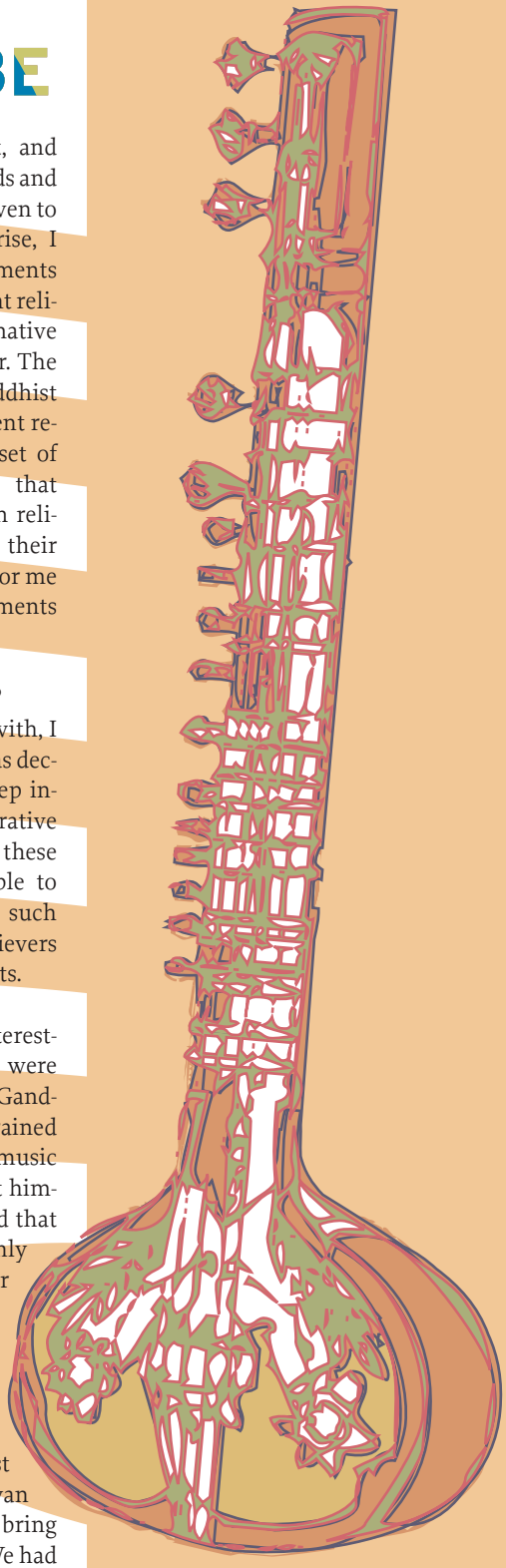
THE SOUND OF EVERY TRIBE

NOEL ISAACS



When A Song That Doesn't Fit

I grew up in a church environment. All I had seen of worship was by way of an old guitar given to my dad by a missionary. He used to play three chords and teach us songs. Later I saw a harmonium, which was considered a "poor man's" keyboard. In those days, playing those instruments in the church was a big hit. The tunes of the songs that we sang in the church were very different from the tunes of the songs that people sang in our Nepali culture. I learned that the songs we were singing were translated songs from an English hymnbook. While those were great songs for me as I grew up listening to my dad play them, when I sang those songs to a person outside the church it was like giving a bat to a soccer player. The songs just didn't fit.

Reclaiming The Sounds Of The Nations

Though I did not understand anything clearly at that time, later I would. I was in a place called Whistler in British Columbia, Canada attending a meeting called a *Gathering Of The Nations*. In one of the worship times, there were over thirty native musicians from different countries, with their native instruments, playing together. The instruments were truly leading the worship. A Samoan guy with a seashell then came forward, and he was blowing so hard on the shell. What I heard in my ears was the dark sound that I was used to hearing when a Hindu dies and the Hindu priest blows a seashell in order to do the burial ritual. To my ears, it was initially the sound of a bad event. Then, when I shook my head a moment later, the Kingdom broke open for me and I started hearing the voice of God! The sound then changed, and it was worshiping the Creator of all sounds.

This started me thinking about, and looking for ways to find, the sounds and the instruments that I felt were given to the Nepali people. To my surprise, I found that all the unique instruments of our culture belonged to different religious groups. For instance, our native drums belonged to a witch doctor. The native percussion belonged to Buddhist monks, which they play in different religious ceremonies. In the mindset of our society, everyone believes that those instruments belong to each religious group for the worship of their gods. I felt like it was impossible for me to somehow bring the instruments back into true Kingdom worship.

Who Will Play These Instruments?

I decided to try anyway. To start with, I bought few of those instruments as decorative items. Yet I knew that deep inside, I wanted not just a decorative piece – I wanted someone to play these instruments. It seemed impossible to me that I would be able to find such musicians, as there were no believers who knew about these instruments.

It's here where the story gets interesting. Typically these instruments were all played by one tribe called the Gandharba. The Gandharba had been trained up by the king to sing and play music with complimentary words about himself. The Gandharba even believed that the Hindu gods had appointed only their tribe to be the musicians for Nepal. Among the Gandharba tribe there were no reported Christians.

In 1998-99 we were getting ready to move to Nepal to plant the first Vineyard Church in the Himalayan Region. Our main focus was to bring worship and justice to the poor. We had seen in the past that worship was key in connecting people with Jesus, and the result was that healing was poured out on the people. In the midst of this, I passionately wanted to bring to the people worship in their own language, rhythm and tune. I found that ninety-percent of

the people with whom I was connecting had no education – and no idea about the outside world – including the music world. At the same time, David Ruis' heart for native sounds in worship was really impacting me.

Playing Among The Players

I began to check out other churches to see what kind of worship was happening in Nepal. To my surprise, I did not find any native instrument player in a worship team environment. I looked through the songs, and there were hardly any typical, Nepali folk worship songs ever written.

Then one day I was in Thamel, a tourist area in Kathmandu, with Jan Stefan from the Brandon Vineyard in Manitoba, Canada. There I saw many Gandharbas singing typical, Nepali folk songs – and those songs were songs about praises to their ancient kings, gods and goddesses. But they were very poor and broken people. They were asking for money and selling their native instruments to the western tourists. After talking to a few of them, they led me to their "club." There, I found about two hundred Gandharbas that were members of the club, and all they did was play songs to tourists and ask for money. That's how they survived.

They started playing songs and instruments for me. There were about fifteen guys with different instruments playing, and after the second song I closed my eyes. It was hard to believe what I was hearing. They were so intense, loving and passionate about every word they sang and every note they played. After half an hour, I realized that they were not singing for money. Singing was their life and they were full of music. I began to cry as I was filled with compassion for them, because they were singing the wrong songs to the wrong gods. Deep inside I felt like I had found what I was looking for all these years. My mind was racing back and forth thinking, "What would happen to this world and to heaven if these people with the same passion and life would worship the true God?" I started praying for their salvation, and rebuked the devil for their bondage. I think I did everything hoping that a big and powerful miracle from heaven would fall, and the whole place would become what I wanted so badly. After two hours, I gave them some money and came back home.

I could not sleep that night, as I started dreaming about them being on our worship team singing these new songs that Nepali people could connect with and love. It was life to my soul, and I was helpless. The next day I went there and they played for me again. A third day they played for me. After two weeks I realized that I was "broke" – financially and spiritually. I had even used our rent money just to hear them play again!

After a month or so I again felt like I needed to go to them, this time not as a tourist – but as one of them. I went to the club and asked them if I could join their musical community, but they laughed at me thinking that I was crazy! When they finally understood my seriousness, they told me that I could only be one of them if I learned to play one of their instruments, called Sarangi. I agreed, bought a Sarangi, and every day went to their club as one of them. One of the Gandharbas taught me to play the *Sarangi*.

Kingdom Dreams Fulfilled

In the midst of learning to play the Sarangi, I was learning about the Gandharbas and was interceding for them everyday. I desperately asked God to bring a breakthrough in their lives, and asked for His Kingdom to come. A few months later, a glimmer of light broke in.

One of their leaders asked me to come and pray for some sick people in his house. They had heard about my personal encounter with Jesus. Wherever we went, and prayed for Gandharbas, we started to see healing. It was a great testimony for them. Many began to give their lives to Jesus, and some became a part of our church family. After much discipleship, some started writing worship songs and became part of our worship team! We recorded two new, original Nepali folk worship albums. These songs were songs from their hearts. The Nepali people enjoy, understand and relate to these songs so well. When we play these songs in our church, the intensity and passion for worship rises like a wave and we see many signs of freedom in our people.

I have learned from my journey with the Gandharbas that the truest joy for a worshiper is to lead others into worship with you – worshipers from every tongue, tribe and nation.



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The Restoration Of

BY DEREK MORPHEW

This article is the fourth and final installment in this series on Celebration. For the first three articles, see the three previous issues of our magazine, or visit us at ***www.insideworship.com*** *for Derek's complete article.*

The Retreat From The Dance

We have noted the attitude adopted by the Council of A.D. 692. Augustine made a similar attempt to eradicate dancing (1265 – 1321). There were perhaps valid reasons for these attitudes at the time, which we are now unaware of. In any event, they were not successful. In 1518 a plague broke out in Europe caused by a poisonous fungus, which developed on rye bread. This produced strange contortions of the limbs and people filled the streets with these strange movements. Many would go on for hours and then collapse and die. This strange dance, called St. Vitus Dance, was judged to be a demonic manifestation by the church authorities. As a result, attitudes to all forms of dance hardened. Dance became synonymous with the demonic.

The reformers opposed dance mainly because of their great stress on the preaching of the word as the focus of worship.

As the church retreated from the use of dance in worship, it was gradually taken over by secular society, and what was originally created by God for the praise of God became the property of men with no love for God. The secularization of dance is a direct result, not of the renewal of the church, but of the retreat of the church.

The Renewal Of The Dance

It was therefore most encouraging to see the restoration of dance in the twentieth century church. There are, in fact, a number of different modes of dance that are emerging within different traditions. Here one should bear in mind that the biblical terminology is flexible and covers a variety of movements. The Hebrew words for dance cover the following spectrum,

to leap or hop,
to play or sport,
to turn or whirl,
to circle i.e. in groups.

The term used for the latter, to dance in a circling group, is translated by the Latin "chorea", leading to the English "chorus". In the history of the church the "processions" of the Greek or Orthodox church continued the element of dance.

Today one may note the following variety of movements in worship. The Latin American Pentecostal churches practice dancing. As one might expect, these movements are rather rhythmic. In most indigenous African churches, a swaying, rhythmic movement is taken for granted as a normal way to worship God. In the British "restoration" movement, a free kind of hop on the spot has become commonplace. This is one of the only possible outlets when one is enclosed in the typical western church seating arrangement. The only way is up and down. In the liturgical churches, a more organized tradition of dance is emerging, based mainly on classical dance theory. Trained groups dance before the worshipping congregation. Then, of course, there is the re-emergence of Israeli dancing as a result of the growing contact between Christian groups and Judaism. Messianic synagogues have proliferated in the United States.

As dance is restored to the church, local congregational leaders will have to find the particular style they feel comfortable with. It will be helpful for Christian leaders to teach their people a correct Christian view of the body. The biblical tradition is holistic. Man is not viewed as a conglomeration of separate elements (body, soul and spirit), but as one whole being, able to express himself through body, soul and spirit (1 Thess.5.23). We are to worship God with heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk.12.30). As the Psalmist says, "My heart and my flesh, sing for joy to the living God" (Ps.84.2 NASB).

There is, unfortunately, a great deal of pagan Greek philosophy that has continued in Christian thinking, together with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, with its separation of the spirit from the body. One finds Christians deducing from Jn.4.23 that worship "in spirit and in truth" means worship with the mind but not with the body, not with the "flesh". This raises a large subject that cannot be dealt with here. The reader may want to consult *The Spiritual Spider Web* (Derek Morphew, VBI Course, www.vineyardbi.org), which deals with the Gnostic problem. Let it suffice to say at this point that a rejection of dancing in worship may sound very theological and biblical but will reveal more about the non Christian influences on the thinking of the objector than anything else.

Current Ideas And Trends

The biblical concept of the body also militates against the "classical" Pentecostal idea of "dancing in the spirit".