

DAILY BREEZE

LAX TO HARBOR

World Festival of Sacred Music

43 events in L.A. will open doors to art and culture

**BY JEFF FAVRE
SPECIAL TO RAVE!**

In 1997, Judy Mitoma received a letter that not only changed her life, but also dramatically altered the artistic and spiritual landscape of Los Angeles.

The letter was from the office of the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, asking for people from around the world to create festivals that would honor the new millennium as a time for world peace and universal understanding.

Mitoma, director of the UCLA Center for Intercultural Performance and a dance professor, wrote back the same day expressing interest, but having little idea what would come of it.

The result was the 1999 World Festival of Sacred Music, an 85-event extravaganza spread over nine days. It was a one-time happening -- or so Mitoma thought.

"But things got worse in the world after the millennium and we came to realize the work never ends, as long as we have the will," she said.

The second festival was held in 2002. And, beginning Saturday, the 2005 World Festival of Sacred Music-Los Angeles begins.

Though the event has narrowed its scope and reduced costs, the breadth and variety of performers and venues remains vast.

Running through Oct. 2, the festival includes 43 events at 37 Los Angeles-area venues, 110 performances and 1,024 participants.

"About 60 percent of the people are new," Mitoma said. "It's difficult because so many of our friends want to participate again, and it's hard to say no. But we want to allow those

who haven't been noticed, who haven't been able to express their voices, the chance to be heard."

The four-hour opening concert, with ticket proceeds going to support the festival, begins at 5 p.m. Saturday at the UCLA Sunset Canyon Recreation Center, 111 De Neve Drive, Los Angeles.

The concert is a reflection of the multicultural nature of the festival. It begins with "The Blessing," performed by Cindi Moar Alvitre of the Ti'at Society of the Tongva Nation. Other performances include Gonja Drums, a group of musicians representing several African countries; Los Folkloristas performing traditional Mexican music; and the Hun Lakorn Lek Puppet Theatre Troupe of Thailand.

Over the following two weeks, music will be performed at venues that include the Torrance Cultural Arts Center, Sacred Heart Chapel at Loyola Marymount University in Westchester and Santa Monica Beach. Among the many highlights:

Sept. 24: "Watts Tower Day of the Drum Festival" will include arts and crafts, food and music from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the landmark Watts Tower, 1727 E. 107th St. The program will end with a large drum circle.

Sept. 25: "Celestial Sounds and Dancing Gods," dance and music of India, Persia and Japan, at the James Armstrong Theatre, Torrance Cultural Arts Center, 3300 Civic Center Drive.

Oct. 1: "World Jewish Music Fest" at the Santa Monica Pier, 200 Santa Monica Pier.

Oct. 2: The closing ceremony, "Honoring the Sea," begins at 3 p.m. at Santa Monica Beach. Attendees are encouraged to wear white and to bring flowers and drums.

Though the music and traditions represented will be unfamiliar to some, Mitoma says the sharing of cultures is key to realizing the festival's vision: that sacred music has the ability to bring forth shared human values of peace, understanding and respect for all living things.

"I know that when people gather with a clear sense of purpose and a desire to engage at a level that goes beyond the entertainment world, that something happens," she said. "If you are a Jew and you enter a Presbyterian church, or you're a Protestant and you go to a Buddhist temple, something happens.

"You cross the threshold of the people you do not know very well and you sit next to people who share your desire for peace on this planet and respect for the earth. You listen to heartfelt offerings of artists who are putting into the universe healing, positive, community-building music, and something happens. I know it does."

• *Jeff Favre is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.*