

# Sacred Music of the Faithful

World festival encompasses varied traditions of religious sounds for two weeks around L.A.

It was Duke Ellington who said, "You can jive with secular music, but you can't jive with the almighty," and it's this knowing deference to the divine that characterizes the joyful array of sounds in the second World Festival of Sacred Music, sprawling over 16 days from Sept. 14 through Sept. 29 in venues across Los Angeles.

The first L.A.-based festival took place in 1999 in response to a call from the Dalai Lama of Tibet, who recognized that just as religious zeal has the power to divide communities through bloody fundamentalist conflict, it also has the power to unite them through mutually respected traditions of worship. Festivals are now envisioned every third year.

This year's incarnation has expanded to the extent of asking: What is the sacred? Is it prayer to a deity beyond? Is it touching the god within? Is it tradition and ritual? Or simply pure beauty?

With more than 200 different acts at 55 events at scores of locations across the region, the festival is a fascinating experiment in touching a spiritual chord common to many Angelenos. What follows are the performances that most intrigued a panel of The Times' music and dance writers.

**Rahat Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan:** It was Rahat's uncle, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who opened U.S. pop ears in the '90s to the passionate Pakistani vocal style known as *qaiwali*, thanks largely to a series of concerts in which he offered the most compelling mix of charisma

Black Madonna, said to offer both physical and spiritual healing powers. Belloni, one of the most famous and revered voices in Southern Italian music and dance today, has designed a signature series of tambourines, some of which she will utilize during an evening



Japanese American Cultural & Community Center  
 The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus are scheduled Sept. 29.



IRIS SCHNEIDER / Los Angeles Times  
 Qawwali singer Rahat Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan will perform.

**The Sacred Music of Duke Ellington:** Known for his lush, suit-and-black tie concert hall or nightclub arrangements, jazz composer and bandleader Duke Ellington occasionally infused his recordings with hints of his religious undergirding. (As a child growing up in Washington, D.C., he often attended two church services on Sundays: one at his mother's Baptist church and another at his father's AME Zion.) During the last decade of his life, after writing a liturgical work for San Francisco's then-new Grace Cathedral, he turned further inward and began to explore the sound of his faith. The Luckman Jazz Orchestra, under the direction of flutist James Newton, will interpret Ellington's work. (Sept. 21)

Lynell George

**L.A. Philharmonic, Mozart Requiem:** Mozart's has become the unofficial requiem of choice for remembering the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. Verdi's may be more

## Sacred: World Festival Plays Holy Sounds

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*BB*  
elan. This "orchestra" is a metal-  
orgy of bells, xylophones and brass  
gongs, all elaborately decorated  
and played in patterns of overlap-  
ping melodies and rhythms in-  
tended to make its audience and  
performers feel marvelous. Every  
gamelan is unique, often the indi-  
vidual product of a village or family  
(or here in the West of a university  
music department). Cudamani,  
which appears for the first time in  
the U.S. Sept. 28 at the intimate  
Wilshire Ebell Theater, is a profes-  
sional company of musicians and  
dancers who live and work to-  
gether but participate in part of a  
larger community. They will be  
something new to nearly all of us.  
(Sept. 28)

*Mark Swed*

### Whirling Dervishes of Damascus:

Music is believed to possess re-  
markable spiritual powers in the  
Sufi tradition. Those powers, de-  
scribed as *sama* (listening), are as-  
sociated with meditation, ecstasy  
and the achievement of a state of  
grace. One of their most impressive  
visual manifestations is displayed  
in the extraordinarily colorful,  
trance-producing dances of the  
Whirling Dervishes of Damascus.  
Rotating in nonstop unison, skirts  
flying, left hand lowered, right  
hand raised to symbolize the con-  
nection between heaven and  
Earth, their performances are mes-  
merizing expressions of the spirit-  
ual essence of music and dance.  
(Sept. 29)

*Don Heckman*

**Lifou Island Dance Theater:** The  
explorers and missionaries who  
nearly destroyed so many native  
cultures across the Pacific were less  
thorough when they reached the  
far reaches of Melanesia. Which  
means you can still find unadulter-  
ated native rites in places like Lifou  
Island, New Caledonia. The coun-  
try is best known for its amazing  
marine biodiversity, but the 16-  
member Lifou Island Dance Thea-  
ter is reputed to be another spec-  
tacular natural resource. With cos-  
tumes made from plants and  
makeup that evokes the animal  
kingdom, this intense performing  
company, making its U.S. debut,  
may well give festival-goers a  
glimpse of the wild untamed Pa-  
cific that existed before "discov-  
ery." (Sept. 29)

*Lewis Segal*

*Tickets for individual events are  
sold separately, ranging from many  
free events to \$110 for the block-  
buster opening gala. Festival hot-  
line: (310) 825-0507; [www.festiva-  
lofsacreamusic.org](http://www.festiva-<br/>lofsacreamusic.org).*