

## May I have this trance?

### Dissecting the groove at the Lake Eden Arts Festival

by Pete Zamplas

The Lake Eden Arts Festival may be the only event of its kind that can promise "good vibrations" and mean it. Where else, for example, can you take a workshop in "sonic yoga"?

The truth is, musical energy grips people on various levels. They hear and feel catchy rhythms, pounding or piercing tones. The music flows, soothes or invigorates, molding moods for deep relaxation, massage or meditation.

According to local musicians and a festival-workshop leader, there are scientific and metaphysical theories that explain the way music triggers emotions and movements. Varying tones or chants are believed to affect states of consciousness – even form energy fields – while higher pitches trigger natural rushes.

#### **"Compelling involvement"**

Among the many other healing-arts workshops LEAF is known for, a vibrational-sound workshop will be held Saturday evening, taught by Glenn Weinstein of Marietta, Ga. As Abuwan, he makes relaxing Middle Eastern and Eastern music, playing bouzouki, flutes, reeds and drums.

Two solo reed instruments – the Armenian duduk and the ney, an open-ended Persian flute – "wail and moan" and are "entrancing but enchanting," Weinstein explains. He also uses other trance instruments – the Indian harmonium and the home-bred mountain dulcimer – in workshops, where he triggers deep-breathing relaxation and meditation as people lie on their backs in a circle.

Weinstein says he employs intuitive healing energies. "I'm painting with sound rainbows. ... I visualize it pouring over everybody."

Many musicians pointed out that people react distinctively to various musical tones or components – physiologically, if not metaphysically. Specifically, lower sounds move hips, while higher pitches produce subtle movements such as head-shaking, Weinstein reveals.

High tones are "bright, uplifting," adds Thomas "Vega" Moore, who provides musical accompaniment for the local-belly dancing troupe Baraka Mundi. The troupe plays the main stage early Sunday afternoon after leading a "playshop" that morning.

High tones, continues Moore, "make you want to move faster, jump for joy. Higher tones are more celebratory. Lower tones are more pensive and melancholy, especially when slowly drawn out. Arabic music is one or the other – celebratory or heart-wrenching."

Well-known local percussionist Billy Jonas believes in Eastern philosophy's link of vibrations to chakras – a chain of "energy centers" said to be aligned along the spine that have both physical and spiritual resonances. And wavelengths are a key: "Lower-toned vibrations tend to move our lower chakras – primal needs and groundedness," he says. "The wavelengths of lower vibrations are longer. Our legs and our lower torso are bigger than our arms and head, so bigger parts of vibration move bigger parts of the body. Smaller vibrations move higher chakras, which are physically smaller.

"I can't verify that's scientific reality," he admits, "but that's how it seems to be. ... I use sounds or rhythm to facilitate not trance, but compelling involvement."

### **Mojo workin'**

Music moves people differently not so much by tones (tinnier drums can be as entrancing as their lower-toned counterparts) – the bigger distinction is between steady rhythms and melodies, says Baraka Mundi leader Lauren "Onca" O'Leary, a dance instructor who heads the Future of Tradition Center for Folkloric Arts with her husband, Draven Arcane, a Brazilian-martial-arts specialist.

"Rhythm is more primal, earthy and entrancing; melody is more soulful," O'Leary clarifies. Hips and shoulders shake to rhythm, while melody "comes out of the heart" to spur hand motion and facial expressions, she says.

O'Leary – who bore the couple's first child Feb. 12 after dancing throughout her pregnancy – credits Middle Eastern, Eastern and tribal music and dance as being "healing, spiritual, embracing."

"Baraka," she says, is Arabic for "spiritual essence. ... It's mojo, inherent magic."

Moore, meanwhile, says he drifts into "another world" when jamming – especially when playing Middle Eastern music.

"I just trance out," he says. "It's more like channeling than playing music. You let yourself go." He plays oud, an ancient lutelike instrument that Moore says is most entrancing when played "slow and haunting, or fast and bright." Bandmates Liam Niblack and River Guerguerian play the multitoned frame drum. "It creates a 3-D sound image that sucks you in," notes Moore. "It has subtlety, low frequency, deep resonance." (Moore claims to have charmed a snake by playing flute and clarinet.)

Band members play off one another, the belly dancers' interpretations and the crowd's reactions. A sudden riff "inspires you to reply, like a conversation," Moore explains. For a candle dance, the band starts off slow and sensual, then speeds up. "It's first smoldering, then bursting in flames. They start moving faster, like fire, more passionate."

Audience participation is also key for Jonas, who leads the festival's "celebration closing" on Sunday. He pounds tribal rhythms on tin cans and trash cans, a frying pan and other recyclables, playing the audience with call-and-response songs and urging them to sing or drum along.

Jonas says musical healing is a two-way street. "When I hear children singing, the dissonance of that vibration makes me smile," he says. "Vibrational healing can happen when someone opens up to you. We've seen the power of music in a physiological way, from the trumpets of Jericho knocking down a wall to sonar bouncing sound waves off the ocean floor. It's a mythological, spiritual and scientific reality."

## **Mountain magic**

Cailen Campbell will play LEAF's main stage both as a solo act and as part of the all-star Gypsy Hicks; the acclaimed local fiddler will also lead contra dances Friday and Saturday, and a waltz workshop on Sunday.

Campbell sees mountain music as a throwback to when "music, dancing and ritual celebration were inextricably interwoven." Contra dancing, he says, is "an incredibly healing and energizing activity that simultaneously stimulates our bodies, minds and spirits. ... When dancers and musicians are synchronized, the room is filled with one giant magical creature, with musicians as the head of the beast. Dancers are its body, pulsing and undulating in uninhibited ecstasy.

"Sometimes," he says, "it's hard to tell who's driving who – dancers' screams and stomps that push the music into deeper and deeper grooves, or the musicians' trancelike spell that propels the dancers towards their climactic fury."

Festival Healing-Arts Director Sierra Hollister, a local yoga instructor, takes music in another direction, funneling that wild energy into everyday activities. Hollister says she cooks while listening to mantra music: "The vibration of my body changes with mantra," she maintains. "I put a better vibration into the meals. And it provides my family a more peaceful, nourishing environment."

## **Instant messaging**

Headliner Donna the Buffalo plays mesmerizing, danceable, acoustic roots music with what it calls "universal messages of celebration, cosmic humor and a big groove." The group's 1998 release, *Rockin' in the Weary Land* (Sugar Hill, 1998), won an Association for Independent Music Award for best rock album.

The band's 1961 tour bus will shuffle into LEAF, bringing timely themes of brotherhood and timeless rhythms, entertaining its loyal "herd" on opening night – and perhaps winning some converts.

As the story goes, the band was toying with names that would both conjure up the wild frontier and touch on the concept of a herd or social gathering. And somehow, over a few drinks, "Dawn of the Buffalo" was slurred into "Donna the Buffalo." The six-piece features Tara Nevins on fiddle, accordion, tambourine and rub board; Jeb Puryear on guitar; and Jim Miller on guitar/banjo. (Nevins and Puryear write songs and share lead-vocal duties.)

The band is based in Trumansburg, N.Y. (Puryear's hometown), near Cornell University (where Miller

got a doctorate in etymology, the study of bugs). Puryear heard Nevins play there in a fiddle band. Donna the Buffalo was formed 15 years ago; soon after, Nevins and Miller married (she grew up near New York City; he's from Saskatchewan, Canada).

Over the past three years, the group has stepped up its touring, and its herd has mushroomed in kind: Fans of various generations and professions drive or even fly across the country to hear the Buffalo. "We're grateful we have them," Miller allows. "They're an interesting collection of lovable nuts."

"Donna the Buffalo has created a whole community and family unto itself, with a different, positive groove and amazing messages in their music," notes LEAF producer Jennifer Pickering.

"It's incredible, amazing," adds Nevins. "They're passionate, up for the moment, ready to spread good energy ...

"Music," she muses, "is a language. When the audience understands the language and responds accordingly, it's powerful both for the audience and band. You're aware of the exchange the whole time, no matter how hard you're concentrating. You feel the energy.

"When it's really happening, it feels like everyone is one. It feels like a pure celebration of life, almost a religious experience. It touches you. That's why we fall in love. It's a color that strikes us."

All that cosmic energy aside, Miller is impressed with how well fans know lyrics – and how strongly they insist on hearing them the "right" way: "When we forget words, they yell them out instantly. They know every word to every verse. I'll sing lines backwards, or in the wrong order; they're totally on it."

## **Festival info**

The Lake Eden Arts Festival happens Friday, May 24 through Sunday, May 26 at Camp Rockmont in Black Mountain.

Donna the Buffalo headlines Friday night at 10:30 p.m. Saturday's headliners include the Be Good Tanyas, a young acoustic trio from Vancouver, Canada, playing its first Southeastern concert. Other top acts include the Holmes Brothers, Nathan and the Zydeco Cha-Chas, soul/gospel act Lloyd Cannady & the Flying Clouds, iconic folk couple Robin and Linda Williams, old-timey Ralph Blizard & the New Southern Ramblers, and roots band David Via & Corn Tornado; local favorites include the Tyler Ramsey Trio and Scrappy Hamilton. LEAF's signature world-music offerings span Samite of Uganda, the Afro-Caribbean Sim Redmond Band, Cuban Solazo, Billy Miller on Arabic flutes, and Celtic Menace, plus many more regional, national and international acts. There's also contra, clogging, swing, waltz and Latin dancing; poetry; storytelling; artisans; arts and healing-arts workshops; camping; and lake activities.

Day-only, partial-weekend and comprehensive ticket packages are available, including a discounted weekend package for Buncombe County residents. To reach Camp Rockmont, take I-40 from Asheville to exit 59. Gates open at 9 a.m. on Friday. For further directions, the latest performance and

workshop schedules, and detailed pricing, call (828) 686-8742 or check out [www.theLEAF.com](http://www.theLEAF.com).