

Living at Peace

Sharon Silverstein and the Peace Project present an evening of part meditation, part concert

By Susan Van Dongen

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BRINGING Kirtan chanting to the public is a natural step in the evolution of Sharon Silverstein's singing and songwriting career. For years she has shared the healing power of music with people from all walks of life — young students, older adults, spiritual seekers and corporate executives.

As a yogini — an avid practitioner of yoga who happens to be a female — Ms. Silverstein often combined chanting with her yoga practices. She says she was introduced to Kirtan chanting, a kind of sonic yoga that is part of the ancient Indian tradition of Bhakti yoga, at various studios in the area and was immediately drawn to it.

"As soon as I start any kind of chanting, I am absorbed into the vibration," she says. "It's a way for me to come to a state of stillness and meditate through something I love — music. With Kirtan, the chants have the healing vibration built into them. But then, being able to add my own musical influences to accompany the mantras, makes it a real creative effort that I love."



The Peace Project will present The Bliss of Kirtan at the Center for Relaxation and Healing in Plainsboro.

Ms. Silverstein and the Peace Project will present The Bliss of Kirtan, an evening of Kirtan chant, at the Center for Relaxation and Healing in Plainsboro Dec. 5. The newly re-configured Peace Project features Ms. Silverstein on vocals, guitar and harmonium, Joni Knapp on tabla, Darlene Popkey on flute and harmonium, and Marie Soffel on djembe and ubang.

The Hillsborough resident stresses that participants don't have to be spiritual devotees, "yoga types" or even good singers to enjoy Kirtan. And even though the mantras are in Sanskrit, you don't have to know the language to sing along. The words are simple and repetitive, and since they carry the actual essence of the mantra (or prayer, if you will), you just let them wash over you and eventually absorb them.

For we New Jerseyans, trying to maintain our sanity in this crowded state with its rush-rush culture, Kirtan is a delightful way to free the "monkey mind" of its ongoing and often negative chatter.

"The instruments and melody create a vibrational meditation that can carry us effortlessly to stillness," Ms. Silverstein says. "When we chant the mantras, repeating them over and over, the mind starts to relax and calm down, and creates a way for the heart to open, because the mind doesn't have anything else to do. It stills the mind and awakens us to our true nature."

"It's actually better if we don't know what the Sanskrit words are," she adds. "The mind has less to deal with. In Sanskrit, the words equal the vibrational frequency. In other words, 'shanti' doesn't mean peace, vibrationally it is peace. When you chant 'shanti,' you sympathetically vibrate 'peace' to you. It's really just revealing the peace within you. That's why the chants are so powerful."

The acoustic instrumentation provided by the Peace Project makes the evening of Kirtan a combination of a meditation session and a concert, although there is no clapping between the chants.

"We sit in silence for a couple of minutes between the chants, and there's this stillness that's so beautiful, you can feel within you what has been transformed," Ms. Silverstein says.

The singer-songwriter, whose voice falls somewhere between Sheryl Crow and Grace Slick, has been bringing her transformational music to Delaware Valley audiences for 25 years. A Rutgers graduate, Ms. Silverstein left a lengthy career as a music teacher in the New Jersey school system to found Living at Peace, with the vision to help create a world "where people can feel unconditional love for themselves and others," she writes on the company's Web site.

In addition to being a singer-songwriter, Ms. Silverstein facilitates drumming circles for health and wellness, teambuilding, community and cooperative events. She uses a combination of drumming circles, her original songs and motivational speaking to help families and communities have deeper, stronger relationships.

A native of New Jersey, Ms. Silverstein has performed at the Philadelphia Society for Art, Literature and Music, the New York City Marathon, the New Life Expo in New York, John and Peter's in New Hope, Pa., and the Paul Robeson Center for the Arts in Princeton, as well as many other venues and yoga centers throughout the tri-state area.

"I'm really into sound healing so leading Kirtan is a natural extension to the drum circles, using vibration as a healing modality," Ms. Silverstein says. "And although I loved my old group, I'm really happy with the new group. Things just fell into place with these musicians. People have told us, 'we feel the love coming from you all,' and for the kind of music we're doing, it feels right. It's good to be in a group that is so heart-centered."

- Sharon Silverstein and the Peace Project will present The Bliss of Kirtan at the Center for Relaxation and Healing, 666 Plainsboro Road, Building 600, #635, Plainsboro, Dec. 5, 7:30 p.m. Suggested donation is \$10. 609-750-7432. www.relaxationandhealing.com. Sharon Silverstein on the Web: www.myspace.com/sharonsilversteinandthepeaceproject. Living at Peace on the Web: www.livingatpeace.com

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