

# HEARING THE VOICES OF CREATION



MANY HEAVENS, ONE EARTH

HEARING THE VOICES  
OF CREATION

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ARC

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*Hosted by...*

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## ORDER OF CELEBRATION

### PRELUDE: THE TIME BEFORE TIME

1. Opening introduction by Martin Palmer and Sally Magnusson.
2. Sheshbesh, the Israeli Palestine Orchestra's Arab Jewish Ensemble perform classic Western and Arabic music

### PART ONE: THE CREATION

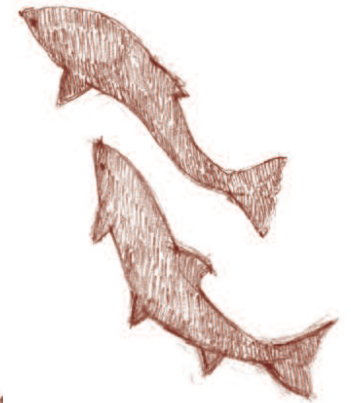
3. Baha'i – reading.
4. The Dawn of Creation – Beeja Dance Company perform to a hymn from the Rigveda Hindu text.
5. Shinto priests chant a prayer to the spirits of the rocks and trees.
6. The New Psalmist Baptist Choir and cantor Rabbi Lionel Rosenfeld sing Psalm 148 - all creation gives thanks to the Creator.

### PART TWO: THE CRISIS

7. The Conference of the Birds. Narguess Farzad and Matt Addis read an Islamic story of nature trying to work together to solve crises.
8. Islam. Description here of call to prayer from Martin Palmer.
9. The Sacrifice of Life. A dance dramatisation by Beeja Dance Company, from a Buddhist Jataka story, telling of one of the Buddha's previous lives as an animal who gives his life for others to live in safety.
10. The Story of the Tree. The Anglo-Saxon poem, the Dream of the Rood, sung as a Spiritual of the Passion of Christ which is told from the standpoint of the tree and its sacrifice, sung by James Morant and the New Psalmist Baptist Choir.

PART THREE: RESTORING THE BALANCE

11. Praying for unity of all life in order that all life might flourish. A chanted prayer from the Sikh Holy Book the Guru Granth Sahib sung by Dr. Rajwant Singh and Mrs. Balvinder Kaur.
12. Restoring the balance of the universe – chanted by Young Master Ren from the China Daoist Association and colleagues.
13. The St Francis Canticle of the Creatures is sung by James Morant and the New Psalmist Baptist Choir





## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this Celebration and to Hearing the Voices of Creation. Through the diverse traditions of the world's major faiths we are going to experience words, dance, ritual and music which in their various ways allow us to hear, for once, not from human beings, but from so many other aspects of creation.

Each faith has of course its own unique understanding of the origin of life and of our place within it. Yet together, their insights offer a profound and in some ways, linked vision of us and our place within Creation. We have woven this wisdom into a narrative which takes us from Creation in all its diversity, richness, and relationships, through the Crisis that we human beings have brought about, and finally to a vision of restored harmony and balance.

The drama will remind us of our place within the greater picture of all life upon earth, and beyond, and give us a sense not only of our insignificance and failure but of our strengths and our wisdom, within the cosmic framework of the whole of Nature. Through this we are reminded that we are a part of nature, not apart from nature.

PART ONE



THE CREATION

IN EVERY TRADITION ARE HYMNS,  
SONGS, PRAYERS WHICH GIVE THANKS  
FOR THE SHEER WONDER OF LIFE ON  
EARTH. IN EVERY TRADITION THERE IS  
ALSO THE SENSE THAT WE ARE NO  
MORE THAN A TINY PART OF ALL THAT  
GIVES PRAISE AND THANKS FOR THE  
COMING OF LIFE AND FOR ITS  
MEANING AND PURPOSE. AND WITH  
SUCH PRAISE AND GLORY COME THE  
INEVITABLE QUESTIONS. WHY? WHY  
DOES THE WORLD, THE UNIVERSE,  
LIFE ITSELF, EXIST?

#### THE DANCE OF CREATION

The oldest poem in the world, still in use to this day, is found in The Vedas from which Hindu philosophy and life flow. This hymn from the Rig Veda, asks those core questions of where does everything come from and why? Just as we think we have been given the answer – that it comes from ‘The One who sees from heaven above, He only knows’ – the poem strips away that certainty with the enigmatic line ‘Or perhaps he does not know...’ Faith can be as much about exploring and questioning as it can be about answers and certainty.

There was at first no Being—  
Nor non-being.

There was no air, nor sky beyond.  
What stirred? Where?  
In whose protection?  
Was water there, deep beyond measure?

There was no death,  
Nor deathless state,  
No night, no day.

The One breathed without breath  
By its own power.  
There was nothing else; no, nothing else.

Darkness lay wrapped in darkness,  
All was water, all, all over.  
Love began.  
At first desire was the seed of mind.

Sages and poets, searching within,  
Saw the link of Being in non-Being.

But who really knows? Who can tell?  
How it was born or where creation began?  
The gods came later  
Along with the creation of this universe.  
Who knows whence it all came?

That from which creation came,  
Whether founded well or not,  
The One who sees from heaven above,  
He only knows.

Or perhaps he does not know...

*Hymn 10:129, 'Creation,' from the Rig Veda*

FROM THE BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURES

The religious sense of God filling the world, and of every place and every aspect of creation responding to Him, is captured in this 19th century quote from Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet of the Baha'i faith:

BLESSED IS THE SPOT, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.

*Bahá'u'lláh*

## HONOURING THE DIVINE WITHIN EVERY ASPECT OF NATURE

It has become common in environmental discourse to talk of us ‘protecting nature’. In the Shinto tradition of Japan there is a different way of thinking. Shintoism believes we need to recognise that nature protects us.

At the heart of Shintoism lies the belief that ‘we should look at our environment with the spirit of reverence and gratitude,’ that we are surrounded by Kami – the spirits of all created things.

This reverence and gratitude is to be seen in the respect shown to the kami which surround us wherever we are. In Shintoism, priests offer thanks to the local kami. Here, with a clap to draw their attention, they will thank the kami in the river, on this hill and in the Great Park and its trees, before offering thanks to the source of life, the sun. For them the point is that we are not the focus of attention for the other aspects of creation—just a part of this wider world of life on earth.

## ALL CREATION PRAISES GOD

The Psalms of the Hebrew Bible are poems and hymns of praise to God as Creator and as Defender. In Jewish thought life is the deliberate work of God as Creator and to God all aspects of Creation return praise and glory. Psalm 148 sees the whole panoply of God’s creation rising to praise God and that humanity has a place within this.

At the heart of this song is the refrain: ‘Let them all praise the name of the Lord.’

### *Psalm 148*

Let heaven praise the Lord:  
praise him, heavenly heights,  
praise him, all his angels,  
praise him, all his armies!  
Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, shining stars,  
praise him, highest heavens,  
and waters above the heavens!  
Let them all praise the name of the Lord,  
at whose command they were created;  
he has fixed them in their place for ever,  
by an unalterable statute.

Let earth praise the Lord:  
sea-monsters and all the deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and mist,  
gales that obey his decree,  
mountains and hills,

orchards and forests,  
wild animals and farm animals,  
snakes and birds,

All kings on earth and nations,  
princes, all rulers in the world,  
young men and girls,  
old people, and children too!  
Let them all praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name and no other is sublime,  
transcending earth and heaven in majesty,  
raising the fortunes of his people,  
to the praises of the devout,  
of Israel, the people dear to him.

Alleluia.

## PART TWO



## THE CRISIS

ALL IS NO LONGER WELL WITH NATURE. CREATION HAS BEEN ATTACKED AND IS IN PERIL AND WE ARE IN THE MAIN, PERPETRATORS OF THIS. IN EVERY TRADITION, THERE COMES THE MOMENT WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG AND THE BALANCE, THE NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS IS DISRUPTED – BY OUR ACTIONS, OUR FEAR AND OUR GREED. ONCE THE BALANCE IS BROKEN, LIFE BECOMES HARDER FOR ALL. THE COMMON THREAD IS THAT HUMAN BEINGS HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT INTO THE MIX OF LIFE WE HAVE BROUGHT DESTRUCTION, STRAIN AND PERIL IN WAYS FOR WHICH WE MUST NOW TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND SEEK TO AMEND, FOR UNLESS WE DO, WE MAY UNRAVEL THE THREADS OF LIFE AND DESTROY THAT WHICH HAS BEEN CREATED, LOVED AND NURTURED FOR UNTOLD BILLIONS OF YEARS.

## THE SACRIFICE OF LIFE

One of the most popular groups of stories in Buddhism are the Jataka stories. These tell of the many previous lives that Buddhists believe were lived by the one who became the Buddha. Through these many reincarnations and the lives lived of great kindness and virtue, it is believed that the Buddha was able to reach the stage of Enlightenment—for Buddha means The Enlightened One.

One of the most famous such Jataka stories tells of when the one who would become the Buddha was the King of a troop of monkeys.

### *The Story of the Monkey King*

THE BUDDHA WAS BORN as the king of a mighty troop of monkeys who lived contentedly high in the Himalayas, far beyond the reach of human beings. One of their delights was to feast on the mangos which grew on a vast tree beside the river Ganges.

One day, one of the mangos fell into the river and was carried down stream until it reached the great city of Varanasi. Here it was caught and taken to the king for its scent and size was a marvel to all who beheld it. The king was overwhelmed by the fruit when he saw it, smelt it and ate it – so much so that he summoned his troops and set off up the river to find the source of the fruit.

At long last they arrived in the valley where the tree stood and as it was late in the day, they settled down ready to pick the fruit the next day. That night the monkeys arrived for their usual feast. The king awoke, saw the monkeys taking what he now saw as his fruit and ordered

his archers to surround the tree so that no monkey could escape. 'We will kill them all in the morning and feast on fruit and monkey flesh,' the excited king declared.

The Buddha Monkey King heard this and realised what danger his troop was in. Using his astonishing powers he leapt from the tree, over the heads of the archers and into the edge of the forest. There he found a long creeper and tying it around his waist he leapt back in order that the monkeys could escape along the creeper. But he had miscalculated. The creeper was not long enough and only by tremendous effort was he able to grab hold of a branch on the edge of the tree. Realising he had little time, he urged the monkeys to run across his back and along the creeper to safety. The young and fit were soon across but the old, the infirm and the very young needed more and more time to make their way to safety. The monkey king felt his strength ebbing away but with grim determination he held on until the very last of the monkeys has passed over to safety.

The king had the dying monkey king brought down and asked him why he had given his life in this way. The king said 'What are they to you and you to them Oh Great Monkey King?' To which the Buddha replied 'I have made those I ruled happy. Follow my example O King.'

And having spoken, he died.

## THE STORY OF THE TREE

One of the most striking Christian poems is the seventh century Anglo-Saxon poem, 'The Dream of the Rood'. The 'rood' is the tree on which Christ was crucified – and it is our narrator. It describes what it feels like to be cut down in the forest, torn from your natural setting and then slashed into the shape of a pole ready to be the stake upon which a man is to be cruelly put to death. In the section we hear today, sung as a spiritual especially created for this Celebration, the tree laments that it wanted to fall and crush the human beings who had cut it about and who then took one of their own and crucified him. But the tree also knows that it has a cosmic role to play. In this remarkable Christian work, the suffering of the tree and of Jesus himself reflect the wider pain and suffering that humanity causes to its own kind and to all creation. This is why the songs says 'All Creation wept.'

Men bore me  
on their shoulders and set me on a hill.  
Many enemies held me fast there.  
I saw the Lord of All coming swiftly  
and with such courage to climb upon me.  
I did not dare to bend or break then  
when I saw the surface  
of the earth tremble,  
for it was against my Lord's desire.  
Tumbling I could have felled  
all my enemies.  
but I stood firm and true.  
Then the young warrior,  
God Almighty Himself,  
stripped and stood firm  
and without flinching.

Bravely before the multitude  
 He climbed upon the cross  
 to save the world.  
 I shivered when the hero clung to me,  
 but I dared not bend to the ground,  
 nor fall to the earth.  
 I had to stand firm.  
 I was a rod raised up,  
 I bore on high the mighty King,  
 The Lord of Heaven.  
 I dared not stoop.  
 They drove nails into me-  
 see these terrible injuries,  
 the open wounds of malice.  
 I dared not injure these enemies.  
 They insulted us both and I was soaked in the blood  
 that ran from the Man's side after He set his spirit free.  
 On that hill I saw and endured much.  
 I saw the God of Hosts stretched on the rack.  
 I saw darkness covering the lifeless body of the Ruler with clouds.  
 Against His shining radiance  
 shadows swept across the land,  
 strange powers moved under the clouds.  
 All creation wept,  
 weeping and moaning for the death of the Kings.  
 For Christ was on the cross.

#### THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

This allegorical, moving poem, written by the Persian poet Attar in the 12th century, tells the story of a group of birds who set out to find their Lord and master. Their journey, narrated originally in Persian, takes them through struggle and pain, fear and disillusionment, towards a final goal of wisdom. It is a story of the soul's search for God and truth. These sections portray the endeavours and suffering that accompanies the journey — for all life not just human beings, or even just birds. One clear, simple message of the poem is: to achieve what is worthwhile, we have to strive and overcome the obstacles placed before and around us.

The hoopoe paused, and when the group had heard  
 His discourse, trembling fear filled every bird.  
 They saw the bow of this great enterprise  
 Could not be drawn by weakness, sloth or lies,  
 And some were so cast down that then and there  
 They turned aside and perished in despair.  
 With fear and apprehension in each heart  
 The remnant rose up ready to depart.  
 They travelled on for years; a lifetime passed  
 Before the longed-for goal was reached at last.  
 What happened as they flew I cannot say,  
 But if you journey on that narrow Way,  
 Then you will act as they once did and know  
 The miseries they had to undergo.  
 A handful lived until the voyage was done-  
 Of every thousand there remained but one.  
 Their hearts on fire with love- too late they learned  
 Their folly when their wings and feathers burned;  
 Some died of thirst; some hunger sent insane,

Till suicide released them from their pain;  
Some paused bewildered and then turned aside  
To gaze at marvels as if stupefied;  
Some looked for pleasure's path and soon confessed  
They saw no purpose in the pilgrims' quest  
Not one in every thousand souls arrived—  
In every hundred thousand one survived...

The pilgrim will confess: 'I cannot say;  
I have no certain knowledge anymore;  
I doubt my doubt, doubt itself is unsure;  
I love, but who is it for whom I sigh?'

#### FINDING THE PATH

The world's religions confront us with vast questions of meaning and purpose. They tell us that this world is a hard path to walk and that the journey will ask of us more than we expect or want.

They also tell us that they believe we do not make this journey alone.

Islam believes that Allah has provided humanity with the intellect and gifts to be maintainers of His Order upon earth. Returning to this order, this balance is, Islam teaches, the way forward, and this is revealed for Muslims through the Holy Qur'an.

WE CREATED HUMANITY and gave the faculty of speech. The sun and the moon rotate in ordered orbits, the plants and the trees, too, do obeisance. The firmament – He raised it high, and set the balance of everything, so that you humanity may not upset the balance. Keep the balance with equity, and fall not short in it.

*The Qur'an: Surah 55:3-9*

PART THREE



RESTORING THE BALANCE

MANY FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THE SCALE OF OUR ABUSE OF NATURE. BUT EVERY FAITH TEACHES THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME SUCH DESPAIR, THAT WE CAN ALSO HOPE, AND THAT, YES, WE CAN REBUILD BROKEN LIVES, BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS, EVEN BROKEN ENVIRONMENTS. THAT IS WHY WE HAVE CALLED THIS A CELEBRATION. IN THE PLANS AND COMMITMENTS OF THE MAJOR FAITHS TO PROTECT A LIVING PLANET, GROUNDED IN FAITH AND DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ALL OF GOOD INTENT, WE SEE HOW WE CAN BEGIN TO RESTORE THE BALANCE. WE CAN SEE A WAY FORWARD, THROUGH SHARED HOPE OF A BETTER FUTURE.

#### FINDING OUR PLACE IN THE VASTNESS AND WONDER OF CREATION

In the late 15th century, a visionary arose in India called Guru Nanak. From his search for the God who lies beyond our definitions of Him and our religious dogmas arose the teachings which came to form Sikhism. One day Guru Nanak was asked to offer incense and candles before a shrine. He refused to do so and in response sang this hymn, now the evening prayer of Sikhism, sung every nightfall in gurdwaras all around the world. In it he asks why we as mere human beings, should even try to make offerings to God, when nature itself, through the sun and moon and stars, offer lamps, the mountains and trees offer incense and the flowers offer themselves before the shrine of God. Once again, these words are there to remind us of our place within a greater grandeur and asks from us humility.

#### *Arti – The Offering of All Nature*

The heavens are Your offering tray  
The sun and moon Your lamps;  
The galaxy of stars are pearls strewn before You.  
A mountain filled with sandalwood trees is Your incense stick  
Breezes that blow are the cooling fan;  
All the woods and plants  
All flowers that bloom  
Take their colours from Your light.

Thus we together with nature wave the offering tray of lights  
How beautiful is this ritual.

CALL THE WORLD BACK INTO BALANCE

Daoism presents us with a challenge. In its teachings there are three fundamental forces which, when they work together, balance the world and bring harmony back to a disturbed and turbulent world. These three forces are Heaven, Earth – and humanity. Daoism takes its name from the Chinese word for The Path or The Way. It believes there is a fundamental Way of Nature which if we follow and work with it, will bless our efforts. But if we struggle against or ignore, we will bring distress, pain and suffering to us and to the world.

This liturgical chant is a cosmic journey, which opens with a call to the four gods who are said to protect the four directions – deities you can see at the entrance to any Chinese temple. They are believed to protect against evil. This is followed by invocations of what are seen as the primal forces of the universe, the yang of heaven, the yin of earth and the life-giving vitality of water, without which life cannot exist. Daoists believe that by honouring and acknowledging humanity's indebtedness to all the dimensions of nature, we can find our place again and as the last line says, 'find our peace within the heart of the Dao.' What, this prayer asks us, are we going to do with our power over life and death that includes not just species but entire eco-systems?

*From 'The Book of The Great Void Emperor'*

The East protects life through the Green god through whose perfection our souls are held and long life and prosperity comes to all.

The South protects life through the Red god through whose strength all other forces are overcome and peace reigns forever.

The West protects life through the White god through whose struggles with evil, all are saved.

The North protects life through the primal god through whose skilfulness the world is now able to enter a glorious future.

The Centre protects life through us, who flying free, unite Heaven and Earth again.

Soar up to visit the Great Void, there to worship in the Court of the Jade Emperor while down below all evil is removed and all living creatures are blessed and prosper.

Respectfully, we invite from on high:

The Heaven official who removes all that troubles Heaven.

The Earth official who removes all that troubles Earth.

The Water official who removes all that troubles water.

The Five Emperors who remove all that troubles the five directions.

The Four Sacred Ones who remove all that troubles the four seasons...

They will be restored to a balance with all the elements—water, fire, wood, metal, earth...

The Qi, the True Breath of Life, fills the entire world and from this all life, uncountable lives will find happiness.

Freed from all obstacles, freed from all disaster, we find our peace within the heart of the Dao.

#### ALL CREATION SINGS TOGETHER

The need to restore our relationship with nature, to see in all life around us a family of creation, is common to many religions. For example, as we have just seen, Daoism asks us to return to The Way and to be restored to fellowship with all nature. Islam asks us to remember what we have been told and the skills we have been given. Sikhism offers us a sense of our place within a greater purpose while Shintoism asks us to be humble enough to know where we fit in and how nature protects us as part of the family of life on earth.

In words which link so many faiths here today, St. Francis, a saint revered by Christians of many kinds and the patron saint of ecology for Catholics, put this vision into his poem *The Canticle of the Creatures* written in the early 13th century. Today we have made commitments which could help to bring back our sense of being part of this Family of Nature. Through this it may be that we can recover this sense of being part of Creation, of celebrating what we have been given and what powers and skills we have, and so we can together Restore the Lost Balance.

Good Lord, most high almighty,  
To you all praise is due,  
All glory, honour, blessing,  
Belong alone to you;  
There is no one whose lips  
Are fit to frame your name.

Be praised then my Lord God,  
In and through all your creatures,  
Especially among them,  
Through our Noble Brother Sun,

By whom you light our day;  
In his radiant splendid beauty  
He reminds us, Lord, of you.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and all the stars;  
You have made the sky shine in their lovely light.

In Brother Wind be praised, my Lord.  
And in the air,  
In clouds, in calm,  
In all weather moods that cherish life.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;  
She is most useful, humble, precious, pure.  
And Brother Fire, by whom you lighten the night;  
How fine is he, how happy, powerful, strong.

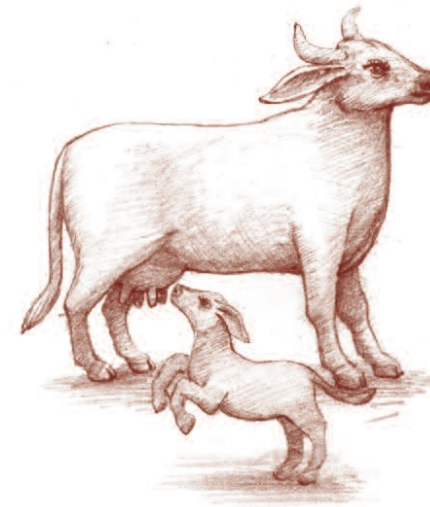
Through our dear Mother Earth be praised, my Lord,  
She feeds us, guides us, gives us plants, bright flowers,  
And all her fruits.

Be praised, my Lord, through us  
When out of love for you  
We pardon one another.  
When we endure  
In sickness and in sorrow  
Blessed are they who persevere in peace;  
From you, Most High, they will receive their prize.

Be praised, my Lord, praised for our Sister Death,  
From whom no one alive can hope to hide;  
Wretched are they who die deep in their sin.  
And blessed those, Death finds doing your will...

For them there is no further death to fear.

O All People, all Creation! Praise God and bless him,  
Give him thanks  
And serve him very humbly.







## PERFORMERS

### PRELUDE: THE TIME BEFORE TIME

*The Creation of Music*  
Shesh-Besh, The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's Arab-Jewish Ensemble

### PART ONE: THE CREATION

*From the Baha'i Scriptures*  
Narguess Farzad

*The Dance of Creation*  
Beeja Dance Company

*Honouring the Divine Within Every Aspect of Nature*  
Shinto Priests  
Reverend Hironobu Katori  
Reverend Takao Ina  
Reverend Katsuji Iwahashi

*All Creation Praises God*  
Lionel Rosenfeld – Cantor  
The Baltimore New Psalmist Baptist Choir

### PART TWO: THE CRISIS

*The Sacrifice of Life*

Beeja Dance Company

*The Story of the Tree*  
Soloist – James Morant  
The Baltimore New Psalmist Baptist Choir

*The Conference of the Birds*  
Narguess Farzad - narrator  
Matt Addis - narrator  
Fariborz Kiani - daf drum

*Finding the Path*  
Ibrahim Mogra

### PART THREE: RESTORING THE BALANCE

*Arti – The Offering of All Nature*  
Dr Rajwant Singh  
Mrs Balvinder Kaur

*From the Book of the Great Void Emperor*  
Daoist Monks  
Master Xingzhi Ren  
Master Shihua Yang  
Master Xinyang Huang

*All Creation Sings Together*  
Soloist – James Morant  
The Baltimore New Psalmist Baptist Choir

*Master of Ceremonies*  
Sally Magnusson and Martin Palmer

*Shesh-Besh, The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's Arab-Jewish Ensemble*

Reham Hamade- soloist

Yossi Arnheim- flute

Alfred Hajjar- nai

Saida Bar-Lev - violin

Sami Khsheibun- oriental violin

Bishara Naddaf- percussion

Ramsis Kasis – oud

Peter Marck- double bass

*Beeja Dance Company*

Anusha Subramanyan - dancer

Michael Ormiston – multi-instrumentalist, Mongolian khoomii singer

Omar Ebrahim - narrator

Vipul Sangoi – creative director

*The Baltimore New Psalmist Baptist Choir*

Cassi Brown, Antoinette Spence, Joyce Street, Linda Harris, Diann Cupid,

Joi Thomas, Sharon Dickerson Greene, Roderick Hairston, Albert Prater,

James E. Morant, Raymel Mosely, J.D.Alston, Patrick Alston

KH checking which of above are playing keyboards and guitar

Do we include Reverend Al?

*Notes*

The English translation of The Conference of the Birds comes from the Penguin Classics edition of Dick Davis's translation

## BENEFACTORS

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