



PRESS RELEASE

Shanti – A Journey of Peace

Contact:

Bhavani Iyer (713) 340-0828

BhavaniIyerOD@gmail.com



Houston - More than 200 local performers will come together in the spirit of joy and harmony, as the Houston Indian community collaborates with the UNAIC choir and composer Kanniks Kannikeswaran to present *Shanti: A Journey of Peace* on Saturday, March 13th, 2010 at the Cullen Performance Hall in the University of Houston, Houston, TX. This one of a kind musical theater production will feature a 150 member choir, a 30 member chamber orchestra, accomplished dancers from the Houston area, spectacular visual imagery, and more. The Houston Indian Consul General, Mr. Sanjiv Arora, will be the guest of honor at the 8:30 PM show, the second of two back-to-back shows. A galaxy of dignitaries attending the event will include elected officials, leading academicians, industrialists, astronauts, and community leaders.

The Houston performance will incorporate the talents of local singers in the Houston area who are helping raise funds for a service oriented non-profit organization **AIM (All India Movement) For Seva** that aims to empower people left behind in India's rise to economic progress. Recognized by the United Nations as an exemplary non-profit service organization, AIM for Seva supports many economically and socially sustainable projects in India.

Shanti: A Journey of Peace is an expansive, collaborative community performance that explores the meaning and message of **peace, joy, and interconnectedness through dance, music, and images of India**. This acclaimed multi-media production – in its **own unique genre of performing arts** is an **epic presentation** of the cultural history of India. It premiered to packed houses at the University of Cincinnati in May 2004 and was performed to a 2500 strong audience at the prestigious Aronoff Center for the Arts, Cincinnati. It was also presented to a packed Zoellner Arts Center at Lehigh University, PA, in 2006 and returned for an encore performance in 2008.

The music of *Shanti* is best described as a choral symphony of Indian raagas; it is **a musical score that cuts across cultures, integrating choral and orchestral harmony with the ancient raaga traditions of India.**

Shanti is created and directed by Cincinnati based visionary musician, composer, and music educator, **Kanniks Kannikeswaran**. All his projects identify and celebrate the threads of commonality between diverse peoples and cultures to build community through the joy of harmony. “*Shanti is a presentation of ideas that shaped a 5,000-year-old civilization on the other hemisphere of the earth, and a look at ancient ideas of diversity, peaceful co-existence, tolerance, and celebrating the joy of existence – ideas that are ever so relevant in today’s world. Shanti is also a celebration of a diverse group of individuals in the Houston area coming together to share this joy of existence,*” said Kannikeswaran.

Shanti also represents the gradual growth of the **Indian American choir movement in the United States**. Indian music is raaga based and focuses entirely on solo performances in an attitude of reverence to the primordial sound. *Shanti* is a pioneering effort in building a repertoire of raaga-based music for choruses. Kannikeswaran’s earlier creations *Basant* in 1994, the *Blue Jewel* in 1996, and *Chants for Peace* in 2000 have contributed to the growth of such a repertoire. It was however his magnum opus *Shanti* that began taking this repertoire around the globe.

Shanti brought about the collaboration between the Greater Cincinnati Indian community, the Martin Luther King Coalition chorale, and other choirs, thus resulting in spectacular performances in 2004 and 2006. The success of the Cincinnati experience prompted the flowering of the Lehigh Valley community of Indian singers who brought this mammoth production to life in 2006 and 2008. Kannikeswaran’s work has resulted in community building through music in other places like Tampa, FL. He has now been working with the Houston community since May 2009, bringing *Shanti* to the forefront here.

Excitement is building as the Greater Houston community regularly rehearses the music score of *Shanti*. A large team of volunteers spanning a range of professions and ages is at work in coordinating the rehearsals and the logistics leading up to the production. A feather in the cap in the upcoming performance of *Shanti* is the partnership with the **United Nations Association International Choir (UNAIC)**, a diverse group of singers of various ethnicities and backgrounds that have been performing under the baton of its artistic director **Phillip Kloeckner**.

The UNAIC performs the widest range of music from around the world in the languages of its origin and strives for the highest goals of artistic achievement, while promoting understanding and mutual respect among all the peoples of the world. Phillip Kloeckner, a faculty at the Rice University, is a multifaceted and internationally known musician whose artistry has been heard in Europe and South America. As artistic director of the UNAIC for the past six seasons, Dr. Kloeckner has helped the multicultural ensemble to establish its place in the cultural landscape of Houston, in part by presenting premieres and revivals of numerous works unavailable elsewhere. He has established an enviable record of collaborating with a refreshing variety of soloists and ensembles from a wide array of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The upcoming performance of *Shanti* will be conducted by **Eric P. Esparza**, Professor of Voice and Diction at the Sam Houston State University, a professional singer and conductor in both Texas and New England.

Luminaries in the Houston Indo-American arts community such as **Rathna Kumar** and leading choreographers such as **Uma Nagarsheth** and others have added their choreographic component to *Shanti* thereby enhancing the community spirit.

Shanti's creator, Kanniks Kannikeswaran (www.kanniks.com) is a composer, musicologist, and music educator of international repute. He has collaborated with leading artists such as Lakshmi Shankar (singer featured in the Academy Award-winning film, *Gandhi*) and with prestigious orchestras such as The Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra and The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Kanniks has lectured extensively on Indian culture and offers music workshops and diversity training at several educational institutions, corporations, and cultural organizations in the United States, India, and Singapore. He is the recipient of the Just Community Award from the University of Cincinnati. Kanniks is a passionate educator too. He teaches Indian Music at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music in the capacity of an Adjunct Faculty. He is also a Visiting Artist in Residence at the Center for India Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL.

For more information about the event, visit www.shantichoir.org

CALENDAR INFORMATION

WHAT: **Shanti - A Journey of Peace**

WHERE: Cullen Performance Hall, University of Houston, Houston, TX

WHEN: Saturday, March 13, 2010

Two Performances (1) 5:00 to 6:40 PM and (2) 8:30 to 10:10 PM

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INFO:

Shanti: A Journey of Peace is an expansive, collaborative community musical theater production that explores the meaning and message of peace, joy, and the interconnectedness of life through the music, dances, and imagery of India. Performed by an 80 member Indian community choir in collaboration with the United Nations Association International Choir, this original, acclaimed multi-media experience will awaken your senses with a symphonic music score based on the raaga traditions of India, a western chamber orchestra, an Indian instrumental ensemble, multi-genre Indian classical and folk dances, and beautiful imagery. The time has never been better to come together in harmony and take a journey of peace with *Shanti* ! (www.shantichoir.org). This performance of *Shanti* will raise funds for AIM For SEVA, an exemplary non-profit organization recognized by the United Nations.