

**FNCC ARTS DIVISION CONFERENCE
ART IS A FLOWER OF LIFE
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CORRESPONDENTS**

Despite differences among the various arts represented at second SGI-USA Arts Division Conference, held May 17–20 at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, participants were inspired to learn that the core of every art form is faith.

Conference-goers' hearts opened immediately in response to the lush, tropical landscape, fragrant with blooming plumeria and gardenia, alive with birds and quick brown lizards with red throats. The FNCC campus presented a gorgeous celebration in the sunlight that rhythmically blended at evening into a spirited symphony of nature's nightlife. Time, too, seemed to expand into relaxed, full moments, each complete and heartfelt.

The centerpiece of the weekend was Friday's meeting, "Never Give Up on Your Dreams," put together by renowned jazz pianist and SGI Vice Culture Department Leader Herbie Hancock as a combination lecture, experience and performance.

The evening opened and closed with performances by a local six-man taiko drum group, Fushu Daiko Inc., playing on drums handmade from Kentucky whiskey barrels. The temperature inside the air-conditioned auditorium rose 10 degrees from all the excitement.

The emphasis of the evening was on faith. Herbie Hancock urged the artists to use the power of daimoku to overcome negativity and fulfill their dreams. Mr. Hancock reminded the participants to "use your art to encourage others. To have dreams, you have to have hope, you have to create hope in your own life. Whatever piece you think is missing from your life, it's there—you have to bring it out."

Further, noting rhetorically that people tend to define themselves by the work they do, and then define their success by their popularity, Mr. Hancock objected: "When I'm eating dinner, I'm not a musician. The only thing I am all of the time is a human being. Chant to see the true entity of your life. Don't look at your art form—develop your life."

Earlier on Friday, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima opened the conference by speaking on the mission of people in the arts. He pointed out that American artists have a mission to go back out to the world to enact kosen-rufu because their ancestors mostly came from other places.

Pascual Olivera, SGI-USA Arts Division leader, urged the participants to chant until their problems disappear. "If it's still not enough," he said, "chant one more day to 'see the moon rise over the capital.' You must resolve to become happy first."

The unbridled energy of the conference pervaded the Saturday night celebrations, one an impromptu jam session with conga drums on the lip of the lake, the other with electric music in the dining hall. As partiers drifted back to their rooms at the end of the night, a third party took shape in the swimming pool with singing and dancing in the water.

In his message to the conference, SGI President Ikeda wrote: "Art—it is a flower of life, an eternal healing power. Nichiren Daishonin expresses the quintessence of the Lotus Sutra as follows: 'Even if you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should all perform a dance. Even if you are not Shariputra, you should leap up and dance. When Bodhisattva Superior Practices emerged from the earth, did he not emerge dancing?' (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1119). We are the Buddhas of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, and so are all equal without discrimination. We awaken to this great truth once we return

to the origin of eternal life. Then we realize the vow of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—to lead all people to happiness through the Mystic Law—as our own. Out of our awakening wells forth the greatest of all joys, and such a joyful state of life will, in turn, become the supreme inspiration for artistic creation.”

Everyone who attended the conference was now ready to embark on their challenging, new mission as “Bodhisattvas of the Arts,” determined to hang on to their dreams to connect to their audiences—not through technique, but from the heart of faith.