

**NEW YORK PEACE CONCERT REFRESHES MEMBERS  
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The venue was Martin Luther King High School on the Upper West Side of New York City. The occasion: a “Peace Concert” sponsored by New York area SGI-USA youth members. The audience: guests, district representatives and SGI-USA members who have been working courageously behind the scenes bringing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to all.

On a balmy Dec. 1, greeted by friendly young members, more than 1,000 dedicated people gathered to hear what SGI President Ikeda called in his commemorative message “a beautiful performance of the harmony of peace aimed at a hope-filled future.” He urged New Yorkers to take the power of the concert back home with them.

The SGI “Super Sounds” band that includes SGI-USA members Larry Coryell, Onaje Allan Gumbs, Shunzo Ono, Ralph Peterson, Buster Williams and Nester Torres, started the afternoon. They played several pieces written by the band members, including their contribution to the intent of the concert—Victory Over Violence—a blues number in honor of a young SGI-USA member shot by police.

Supported by inspired drummers, Nester Torres played a solo piece full of energy and verve that took the audience to a different level of involvement, prompting a standing ovation. New York SGI-USA member Duncan Sheik also sang several moving songs.

New Jersey members made many wonderful contributions, including a very soulful piece by a chorus of young women led by two belting soul singers. Their song was a rousing yet serious plea for peace. The New Jersey African Drummers beat energy into the room with articulate syncopation. Then followed a chorus singing “I Believe I Can Fly,” led by a woman who really sounded like she could.

Group after group performed songs that we had heard before, taking on whole new layers of meaning in light of the events of Sept. 11. Less than five miles north of Ground Zero, these youth were boldly and courageously singing songs like John Lennon’s “Imagine.”

As this song was sung, youth stood tall. Other youth danced rhythmically and professionally, displaying tap, hip-hop and modern. A combined chorus of women and men belted out a very powerful rendition of “The Power of One.” In a way, this was another theme of the activity. “The preparation for this production began at the individual level first,” said stage manager Thia Calloway. “We were victorious in overcoming our personal challenges so that when we came together, we were as one unit with one goal.”

The concert ended with all performers on stage singing “What Can I Do, America?” along with the audience. Paula Taylor remembers, “I had tears streaming down my face, and my guest, Noria, though sightless, was standing up swaying and smiling to the music.”

Carolyn Thompson felt as though the concert “musically took us on a journey that lifted us from Ground Zero to a place where we could feel whole again. We could lighten up a little, rocked and cradled by the music.” Paula Taylor concluded, “Watching this concert, I kept thinking what enormous courage these people displayed to overcome the fear and horror that has gripped New York since Sept. 11.”

Another member concurred: “This was the SGI-USA at its best, courageously performing for the sake of compassionately encouraging others. President Ikeda can rest assured. Led by the youth, New York area members are continuing our recovery. We are standing tall.”

*—Paula Taylor and Carol Thompson contributed to this article.*