

I have had the pleasure to work with Phila Hoopes in rehearsal and performance of the *Gita for Peru* fundraiser held in January 2011. Phila was invited to join the *Gita for Peru Ensemble* which consisted of three musicians who played the classical flute, pipa (Chinese lute), Himalayan bowls and bells, and a variety of African percussion instruments. Phila provided the vocal recitations of excerpts from the classic Hindu scripture - The Bhagavad Gita as translated by Stephen Mitchell.

The ensemble had developed tight musical arrangements as they previously were working with two other speakers who for personal reasons resigned from the group after giving their respective performances. Phila came into rehearsal being unfamiliar with the Gita and the musicians. She immediately sensed the integrity of the musicians and the flavor of the musical atmosphere created by these traditional and exotic instruments. She began to bring the rhythms of the percussionists and pipa together with the melodies of the flute in a vocal context of the scripture with power and grace.

There was a dialogue between everyone at the rehearsals as the arrangements changed to accommodate Phila's remarkable range and presence in the execution of the pieces. She took advice well and incorporated suggestions into her renditions of the recitations. Although the scripture's text was a narration, Phila made it her own by creating a dramatic dialogue between the subjects of the story. The result was totally evocative of the meaning and intention of each character within the story. Phila was able to paint her words with colors and intensity that brought the text of the scripture to life with a force and sensitivity that cast a spell upon the listeners. The flute wove melody around Phila's phrases and pauses that added to the magic of the story.

But wait...there was a bonus! Phila added perfect vocal harmony to several other Kirtan songs performed by the flute player Angela Blueskies.

After several rehearsals, the final performance was thrilling and inspiring. The audience was filled with admiration for all the musicians and especially for the magnificence of the vocal recitations of the Gita by Phila and the mesmerizing melodies of the flute by Angela. The ensemble came together for only these three performances and each was great in their own way, however the final performance, with Phila at the microphone, was the expressive emotional statement that we as the musicians of the ensemble all sought. Perhaps providence will again bring us together for another project.

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