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## **If music be the food of love ... play on!**

### **An article on the subject of purity in the performing arts**

I DON'T WANT TO come across as a prude, nor do I wish to be seen as a hypocrite as my recent musical activities include touring with a pop/rock band and visiting not a few pubs and clubs; and I have to say that I am not entirely comfortable with entertaining people in an atmosphere of smoke and alcohol but it does on occasions give me the chance to promote spiritual ethics amongst the grass roots of society, added to which it is difficult to avoid this environment if you play jazz/folk/blues/rock for money. This seeming incongruity aside, I do feel strongly about the responsibility performers have to their audience and the evident power the performing arts possess as a tool in shaping our society.

Recently we have had terrible shootings and a focus in the media on the effect gangster rap may be having in promoting the use of firearms and gang violence amongst our youth. And a casual glance at most of the cable and satellite music channels that are broadcasting to our homes 24 hours a day will reveal the extent to which overt and diverse sexuality is being promoted, both in the lyrics and visual aspects of performances.

Personally I think the argument as to whether these images and lyrics do in fact affect our society is a silly waste of time. Common sense, and in many cases the memory of our own earlier years, is all that is needed to see just how much pop/rock and rap heroes and their music affect the attitude, opinions and appearance of our young people.

OK, so I may not be appearing on MTV regularly...or at all come to think of it! So why should I worry too much about the morality and ethics of my stage performances and how I may affect society? Nevertheless, I do worry about it, and would love to know just how many other Bahá'ís are concerned and affected by these issues, and just how do Bahá'í artists reconcile some of the environments in which, if they wish to perform as a livelihood, they must mingle.

I sometimes have an image of the New Delhi Temple standing as a beacon in the midst of decay and dishevelment and wonder if we should not see ourselves in this manner. I would certainly urge all Bahá'í performers to stand proud and unswerving in whatever environment they may find themselves performing. In my experience it is surprisingly easy, effective and rewarding to state your morals and beliefs to an electrified audience, although I would strongly suggest you do this after and not before you have stunned an audience with your performance.

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne; but if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance: the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed. The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase.

(Abdu'l-Bahá's words to Mrs. Mary L. Lucas, Compilation of Compilations Vol II)

Music undoubtedly amplifies and enhances the mood of the listener, so it is important for us to engender a mood of fun, colour, humour, purity, devotion, magic and mystery, and above all if music is used as the food of love...keep on playin'.

Steve Day

