

# **Song Circle . . .**

*by Diane Leonetti*

*There is a growing phenomenon whereby people who have given little or no thought to the cause of peace are suddenly moved to make a difficult, personal contribution. From time to time, we hear of inspired, individual efforts like that of Stephanie Quinn, who had an idea that if Arabs and Jews could be brought together in "a song circle," their hearts could be touched in a way that transcends words.*

*A concert violinist, Stephanie Quinn does workshops with music that are designed to open the heart. Highly intuitive, she does them one on one, in small groups, and with as many as fifty people, changing the workshop's design as she goes, to fit the situation and the need. Sometimes the groups compose songs on the spot. Or a person may be led by Quinn into singing "her own soul's song." Whatever happens, hearts are opened in a new way. The workshops can lead to deeper understanding between groups of people and within families.*

*Last fall, Quinn began to think of getting Arabs and Jews to sing together. The idea came out of a spiritual search for a meaningful way to use her particular gifts. An accomplished violinist who had played with symphony orchestras and smaller groups and done studio work, she gave up music in 1984 to be an actress and model. Successful in that field as well, she nevertheless ended three years of work feeling unfulfilled, in fact depressed. "My life was garbage," she said. To find an answer, she began a regimen of daily meditation, asking God to guide her to the place where she could use her talents for the good of humankind. She had not played or even listened to music for three years.*

*Daily requests for guidance led Quinn to meet people who were concentrating on world peace; they also led her back into music. She called Paul Winter whose albums use the songs of whales, wolves and eagles to emphasize the common ground of all earth beings - to talk about getting Jews and Arabs together with music. She thought he might do it. Winter invited her to play with his group and taught her to improvise on the violin, but it was becoming apparent that if anyone were to go to Israel on a musical peace mission, it would be Stephanie herself. New acquaintances began to appear who were willing to finance such a trip and to provide phone numbers of friends in Israel.*

*One person who helped enormously was Yanni Posnakoff, a painter and author and illustrator of children's books (Children's Letters to God). "He gave me tremendous emotional support and prepared me spiritually for this peace mission," said Quinn. He also designed the flyer and provided the words that would introduce her to people in Israel who might be interested in taking her workshops. "Jews and Arabs Invited to Gather," it read, over a Posnakoff sketch of Stephanie. "Stephanie Quinn, musician from USA, is offering improvisational workshops, using sound and tones to explore new links of communication. She helps to open the heart through vibration. Non-musicians and musicians! All are welcome. Bring friends and family."*

*"If Yanni hadn't made himself available twenty-four hours a day, there is no way I could have accomplished and learned as much as I did," Quinn says. But even with a page full of phone numbers and support and encouragement from a number of sources, it was scary taking off alone for Israel, into the unknown with a plan as yet untested, except for some trial runs in New York. Her head was full of scenarios for meeting every type of situation: hostility, indifference, too few*

*or too many people turning up.*

*"My intention was to design workshops for every type of situation I could imagine and give them free of charge to Jews and Arabs, also to find musicians from both groups who would perform together. Music is the shorthand of emotion and our universal language. As more people awaken to the call for peace and reconciliation, it is becoming evident that the human voice and musical expression will be playing an important role in communicating new idioms of harmony.*

*"The first step in working for world peace is the awareness that we must achieve it. Then each of us has to learn inner peace, and next, a true understanding of those who are close to us. Finally, we must love those who appear not to be able to love us back, and forgive them for that. By opening our throats, our hearts can open and then we can direct our minds to the future. Even through the sounds of our speaking voices, we can project peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.*

*She left for Israel last December 13th and came back a month later in love with that country, "with warm feelings in my heart for the people and gratitude for God's guidance and protection throughout my trip."*

*Her first day there, she visited the newspaper office of Yoram Binar, a reporter who is writing a book about his experiences disguised as an Arab in Israel. His friends helped her secure use of the Pargod Theater for workshops.*

*"Every Friday, Pargod has jam sessions. I would bring my violin and join them. Sometimes I played in restaurants with friends I met. Wherever I played, I would ask a Jewish group if they would be willing to produce and perform a concert with Arabs, and vice versa. When I got home, I heard that the idea was continuing, and an Arab/Jewish peace concert took place between Passover and Easter.*

*"I went to the Institute for Co-Existence, the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence, where they helped me mobilize Arabs and Jews to gather on World Peace Day (last December 31). I visited Peace Now, Neve Shalom, the FOR, East for Peace and Abie Nathan, whose Peace Boat Radio had just had a tragic accident at sea. One of his crew was lost in a heavy storm.*

*"The workshops I gave were attended by anywhere from three to fifty people. Each one was different, as I try not to push anyone to do something they are not ready for. At Neve Shalom, I had the pleasure of working with fifty people at once. It was a challenge, because it started at 9:30 at night, after a day of seminars. At 11:30, many left to sleep, but sixteen remained. Spontaneously, I decided to teach them how to create a song together. After agreeing on a theme, we split up into two groups. Each person contributed a phrase and some tones; then we combined the ideas into a few phrases, and the tones to make a melody. We rehearsed it and performed it for the others.*

*"In my group we came up with 'I know why, you and I, walk together into peace.' We started softly, holding hands in a circle, getting louder and louder. We planned to climax the song by pulling the others into our circle and letting it die down. But it began to change to 'I know why, you and I, work together into peace,' then to 'pray together into peace, 'sing together into peace,' and so on. The excitement was electric!*

*"After we exhausted ourselves and stood together in a group hug, a young woman began to cry.*

*Eventually, she explained that she had recently been attacked and beaten by a stranger in Jerusalem. Following the story and moments of quiet weeping, I invited her to sing with me. We started from a single note, with me singing in unison to reinforce her, and then I led her into her own soul's song. There was some coughing to clear her throat, but as soon as her throat opened, her heart burst out in a delightful, wordless melody.*

*"Afterward, we all stood in a circle, arms limp at our sides, eyes closed, soaking up the experience of the last four hours. No one wanted to leave. I stood there with those seven Arabs and nine Jews, thanking God for letting me witness such a night."*

*At the beginning of all her workshops, there is what Quinn calls "the search for the common tone," starting with eyes closed, first breathing, then low sighs. "Then I lead them to make a wide "ah" like in "hot" or "sham in Hebrew, opening the mouth very wide like a yawn, and listening for a ringing sound in the head. I go around the circle to each person and make the necessary adjustments to produce this sound, which contains overtones. They cup their hands behind their ears, so they can hear themselves. After the group is resonating, they take one hand off, listen to the others and try to fit in. After a while, the common tone emerges. Now both hands are down and the overtones ringing at a high intensity. My experience with this group activity is that it can go on for a long time because it just plain feels great. The group feels as one. At this point, the participants usually join hands. Then we go off into other musical adventures."*

*These can include singing individually and together, making up songs and having people sing their names, with the group singing them back. "Singing the names gets people to listen to each other," Stephanie says. "And listening is loving."*

*Back in New York, Stephanie Quinn is presently seeking funds to return to Israel and "continue where I left off as soon as possible." She hopes to go for more protracted stays and "eventually to train others who live there to carry on the work." She has been invited to work in villages all over Israel, especially with children. She wants to learn more at Neve Shalom, to work with Shelley Elkayam, director of the youth division of the World Congress of Religions and Peace, and arrange for more concerts of Arabs and Jews.*

*Stephanie Quinn believes that "the time has come when we no longer sit back and just listen to music; we need to discover that we human beings, all of us, have this incredible sound-making capacity. We can make sounds that go beyond what the mind alone can conceive to activate the creative impulses of the heart."*