

World Sacred Music Festival connects

By Molly Gilmore – The Olympian – Published February 01, 2007

For steel guitarist Dan Tyack, music itself is a higher power.

"It's not about impressing somebody. It's about communication and reaching out and making a connection," said Tyack of Unsanctified Gospel Revival, which will play Sunday in Olympia as part of the World Sacred Music Festival. "It takes people to a whole different place. It can be incredibly intense."

Tyack was raised Unitarian Universalist and his revival is dogma-free, but that doesn't mean it's not a religious experience.

He first experienced sacred steel music, developed at House of God Pentecostal churches, on a trip to Nashville.

"The first time I played with these people, the entire room was completely tuned in to what I was playing and just surprised and overjoyed," he said. "It was an electric moment. It definitely changed my whole outlook on playing music and how I go through life, too, which is understanding that playing music is not about technical proficiency or subtlety – it's about expressing true emotions and about connecting."

Also on the bill for Sunday's World Sacred Music Festival: the Gansango Mandinka Trio and Portland's Shabava, which plays Persian music.

"I was trying to be balanced in as many ways as possible with only three groups: geographically, people from different faith traditions, and different types of sound," said Scott Stevens, the festival's music director.

The third annual festival has a new venue (the Minnaert Center for the Arts) and new timing (February instead of May). Because it's being held earlier in the year, the festival is more compact.

"Instead of doing an all-day thing, we're just doing an evening festival, and instead of having a lot of things going on at once, we're just having the three performances back to back," Stevens said. "We're thinking next year, it will be back to more like it was before, where we'll have a main stage and several other places where people are doing workshops or smaller performances. It will be more of an all-day thing with several things going on at once."

But for this year, the audience will be treated to all three sounds. And what goes on when Unsanctified Gospel Revival plays is a jam with the Holy Ghost, Tyack said. Groups such as the Campbell Brothers are often booked in jam-band venues, he said.

"That seems incongruous given the source of the music, but a lot of the Grateful Dead fans also are looking for ways to expand their consciousness and get to a different place through music, so it kind of makes sense in a way."

But that doesn't mean they create a traditional gospel sound.

"In terms of the sound of it, it's the most rocking music you could ever imagine," he said. "It's a lot closer to the Fillmore in San Francisco in 1969 than it is to a regular church service."

"When you go to these services, people are moving with the music and letting the Holy Ghost fill them, and the music is just the most amazing kind of rocking blues-sounding music you've ever heard, and people get taken to another plane."

That's an experience that Unsanctified Gospel Revival tries to create for its audiences as well.

"What we're trying to do is share some of that intensity and certainly the music that they're doing, but more than the music, to bring some of that feeling to audiences," he said. "We do some playing in churches, but it's mostly bars and concerts and things like that. That's our purpose."

More information: 360-357-7224 or www.olsacredmusic.org



Guitarist Dan Tyack of Unsanctified Gospel Revival is among performers at Sunday's World Sacred Music Festival at the Minnaert Center for the Arts. (Courtesy photo)