

Into The Mystics

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An article by Hazel Young

My dictionary defines a mystic as : "a person who achieves mystical experience or an apprehension of divine mysteries" and I believe many creative artists can be described as mystics, particularly if their work explores the sacred. The epithet applies to certain musicians, whose music is often a source of inspiration for sacred dance creators.

Irish singer **Van Morrison**, for example, is one of the few creative geniuses of rock music: often he has also been described as a mystic, and he once recorded a song called "*Into The Mystic*" (a great song, but not yet - as far as I'm aware - a circle dance!). One of his scores of albums is called "*Avalon Sunset*" [Polydor UK 8392622] and its of particular interest for circle dancers, as it contains the track "*Daring Night*", the source music for June Watt's wonderful dance "*Daring*". "Daring" conjures memories for me of dancing under the stars on a crisp winter night -

"With the Lord of the Dance and the Great Goddess of the Eternal Wisdom

Standing by the light of the moon in the daring night"

whilst the following song on the CD "*These Are The Days*" (which was the inspiration for Keith Armstrong's simple but effective dance "*Surrender*") talks of the magic of high summer -

"These are the days of the endless dancing

and the long walks in the summer night".

I love the music on "Avalon Sunset" - but many people find Van Morrison music unpalatable because they can't understand a word he's singing ! Fortunately, a full translation of the lyrics is included with the CD ! Mystic or no, Van Morrison is a poet as well as a musician, whose lyrics explore all the sacred mysteries of Life.

Loreena McKennitt's music is often misleadingly labelled Celtic. In fact she is Canadian and the Celts are but one of many subjects for her music. She plays the harp and sings like an angel and produces recordings of immense beauty, which have provided a wealth of material for circle dance choreographers. In fact there are probably enough 'Loreena McKennitt' dances for a whole day workshop: there's a thought !! To my ears, her finest work for listening is "*The Mask and Mirror*" [WEA 4509-95296-2] which contains "*The Mystics Dream*" - the music for a dance by Naomi Silver from Canada, and also the music for 2 dances by Nanni Kloke: "*Dark Night Of The Soul*" and "*Marrakesh*". Her other recordings are often equally exquisite: "*The Visit*" [WEA 9031-75151-2] for example, which contains the source music for dances by June Watts ("*All Souls Night*"), Nanni again ("*Between The Shadows*") and by Friedel ("*Tango To Evora*"). and I thoroughly recommend "*The Book Of Secrets*" [WEA 0630-19404-2] source for June's dance "*Raku*" (the wonderful music for this dance is called "*Marco Polo*"). So, enter the imagination of Loreena McKennitt, and you encounter a creative spirit fascinated with the world of Shakespeare, the poetry of Yeats, the Pre-Raphaelites, early Christian mysticism - and the Celts.

In contrast with the rich tapestry of Loreena McKennitt's music, **Carolyn Hillyer's** music is presented in an uncluttered and almost naïve way. Often she simply chants her song above a drum beat, like a shaman beating out an invocation. Hers is the vision of a pagan mystic (she is also a painter who illustrates the subjects of her songs). Her best work is probably her first recording "*House Of The Weavers*" [Seventh Wave HTW001] which inspired a number of well-known circle dances. Bethan Freedman created a great dance "*Seasons Green and Gold*" to the track "*Sacred Marriage*". Liz Brewe was moved by "*Turquoise Lady*" to choreograph a flowing dance in honour of the great oceans, and "*Tread Gently*" was the source for 2 popular dances, one by Bethan, and one by Chrisandra which is a very effective processional dance, especially if the group is encouraged to sing !

In his photographs, **Asha** (a.k.a. **Denis Quinn**) looks the image of a mystic. With his fragile voice, he sounds very much the medieval troubadour, although our perceptions of this musical genre are liable to inaccuracy since few recordings survive from that period ! June Watts created a dance of transformation to Asha's long version of "*Greensleeves*" (from "*Field Of Stars*" [NWCD254]), which he embellishes in true troubadour style, but Asha's best work so far is undoubtedly "*Mystic Heart*" [NWCD183]. It contains the source music for several circle dance classics: the very first track "*Canzone Angelica*" is the music for the lovely dance "*Sonnenwend*" by Susanne Raschke from Germany, which is a dance that for me epitomises the loving community that is circle dance. The second track "*Missa Greca*" is the source for one of Friedel's finest choreographies "*Kyrie*" and "Mystic Heart" also contains the music for Friedel's "*Hallelujah Elohim*" : a joyful dance which somehow always reminds me of the Fool card from the Tarot (I guess Troubadours were often also Fools !) Asha's finale to "Mystic Heart" is a song called "*To My One True Love*" exploring the journeys of the heart, and again we encounter a June Watts dance "*Cloud of Unknowing*" that transforms the world-view of Asha the mystic into movement.

Van Morrison, Loreena McKennitt, Carolyn Hillyer and Asha: four very different artists, four musical mystics - perhaps, but definitions are merely mind exercises which are no substitute for the experience of this music & these dances. An important element of Sacred Circle Dance is the opportunity it offers, to enter the spiritual realm via the dreams of musical mystics and all the brilliant dances they inspire. So dance on, into the mystic.