

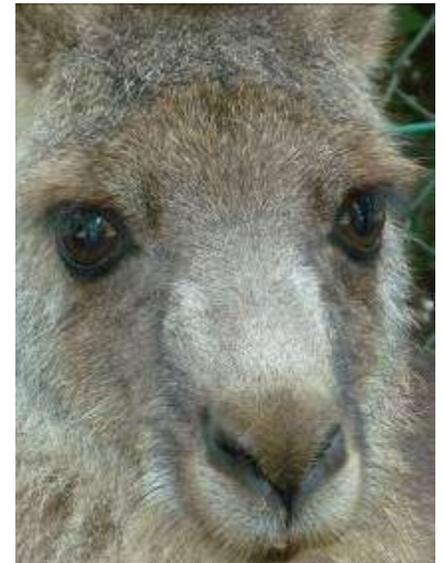
WALI AND ARIËNNE'S VISIT TO OZ  
by Arjuna Benzion (25/4/2010)



Exactly one month ago we had our first taste of Wali and Ariënne's magical presence. As they were staying with Peter and Sabira Jane in the mountains during their first week in Oz, it was only natural that they should come to our mountains dancing group in March. What an introduction it was! With Wali's 12-string guitar and Ariënne's recorder and graceful dance steps and their beautiful voices and dances, we were all enchanted at the beauty and the harmony of their leading. What a model for two people leading together, so in tune with each other and so attuned to the love, harmony and beauty of the Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan that the Murshid Samuel Lewis translated into the Dances of Universal Peace.

Over the weekend of their leading at the Magnolia Centre in Rose Bay and then the week at the Govinda Valley Centre in Otford, this initial experience really deepened for me – I was moved, en-

chanted, amazed, inspired and transported to magical places so many times with their musicality, their wisdom, their way of including the group and really tuning into the people. Today when we were conversing at the airport, I asked them what they would take away from their trip to Oz. Wali said it was the people more than anything else that he would be taking away. He explained how they tune into the people and then develop their programme of dances, and I thought that was what I had felt was so special about their leading.



Every dance leader has their way of leading, with a particular focus and interest, with a particular style and atmosphere, and over the years I've come to appreciate that quality in the various leaders that I've danced with. As well as individual differences, I've become sensitive to cultural differences. For example New Zealand's circles that I've recently experienced again have a strong sense of community and inclusiveness that I really resonate with.

When Shabda and Allaudin were here, a couple of years ago, there was a sense of musical power and enthusiasm. All the musicians sitting in the middle, as I've also seen on a number of You Tube videos of Shabda and his musicians, places a different emphasis on the

music, than say groups that perform a Capella. Yet, I found it interesting how Shabda also celebrated the voices by stopping playing at times, often towards the end of a dance. With Allaudin it was his drumming



and his relaxed friendliness as well as his Zikrs that I found very inspiring. Wali, by contrast, used his guitar playing to heighten the mood, along with the way that after the times of dancing on the breath, he would build the voices – first bringing in the women and then the men and then he would bring in some harmonies and that really transported me as we built to this beautiful climax.



Another thing I noticed with Wali and Ariënne is that this is the first time I've led several new dances immediately after learning them from international teachers. I attribute this to their masterful way of teaching the dances; the precision in the way Ariënne would demonstrate the moves; the way that Wali would stop the singing at certain points and correct the way that we were singing a phrase; the way they took their time to set up each dance, often with a long musical introduction that allowed the dancers to attune to the music of the dance before we began to learn the words, the melody and the movements, which they would present quite systematically.



Perhaps for me, as an adult educator, I was particularly impressed with their ability to communicate with the circle - again I would suspect that came from their intention to tune into the circle. Nowhere was that more obvious than in the feedback session they had during the retreat. A number of dance leaders chose to lead dances for



feedback. The model for feedback they presented was first to ask the dance leader how they felt about their leading. Then they talked about what they liked about the dance leading, thus establishing a positive and appreciative process, before they began to speak about where they felt there could be different ways of doing things or different understandings of the dance. Once they had both spoken they invited other mentors present to comment and then also other members in the circle to comment. This made the process very rich and educational, for everyone present. The leaders I spoke to, who had received feedback, felt this was a very

helpful model that really allowed them to grow as a dance leader.

Finally, there are the 2 CDs and books of dances and the files they so generously shared with the group and the recording session, which was also an important part of the training process. During that afternoon session they went over many of the dances they had led, which gave local leaders a chance to note down movements, to record the melodies and the words and even video the movements. For the first time I used my Nokia Mobile for recording sound and video, which was so great, even if I still have to work out how to get it off my phone – but that's another story.



What I also really appreciated by this remarkable couple was their gentle and very European-like ways, when I saw Ariënne with her recorder, her long grey hair, her folky way of dressing, she reminded me of the archetypal Steiner teacher, really leading and teaching with soul. Wali, with his black clothes and waistcoat, for me was the musician and the philosopher. As well, they were both Sufi teachers. This was evident from the profound morning practices that they led each

morning, which included wazifas, Zikrs, prayers, elemental breaths – again it was very complete and holistic, as well as being creative and inspiring, as were the sessions on the elemental and tasawari walks. In bidding them farewell today at the airport, I felt a strange mixture of joy and gratitude for their visit to Oz, as well as sadness at their going away. However, their lasting contribution will be felt by the dance community in Australia, who had the pleasure and privilege to spend time with these most inspiring and loving teachers.



Report Arjuna Benzion Weiss  
Pictures Australian Nature (mostly) by Wali



*Center, made by Cedar Prest A.M.*



*Arjuna, presenting Aboriginal sticks*



*Closing Kalama outside, near the Labyrinth*



*Cake, presented by Govinda Valley*