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Reaching out to the audience through music and image

Deepa Alexander speaks members of Be-Being about the Li and Sa project that seeks to comprehend Buddhist philosophy and reinterpret traditional music and dance from a contemporary platform

The members of Be Being work in diverse fields of music. How do you all arrive at a common sound?

The first thing we do is talk about what we are interested in within the boundary of Korean traditional music, whether it is inspired by Buddhism, Shamanism, court music or masque dance. We have worked so far on projects based on all these themes. The next step is to get the thematic motif from the whole sequence of music — chants, visual images (such as Buddhist dance and movement) or a certain rhythm found in the theme and to repeat it. We deconstruct and reconstruct the music. It doesn't matter that the musicians work in diverse fields, as long as they have an open mind and an experimental spirit.

How important are the visual arts to your performance?

Our music is based not only on chants but also on dance and story. So the audience “sees” the music, though the visual image is not directly related to the music itself. It is more atmospheric — the audience is encouraged to feel from both the music and the visual image.

What is the message of the Li and Sa project?

Li and Sa means the universe. But we don't focus on sending any message. Jang, the composer, was exposed to Buddhist culture since his youth. Therefore, it was natural that Be-Being chose the Buddhist music project as its first work. Many prefer preserving tradition as it is, but we want to draw out “something” from that tradition.

Any interesting reactions to your concerts so far?

We were once invited to play at a rock concert at Roskilde in Denmark. There was much whistling and clapping after every piece. Our musicians thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Is this your first visit to India? What are your expectations?

Yes, this is our first visit. Buddhist music is so important to us and this is where Buddhism originated. We plan to meet Indian musicians and learn about Indian instruments and Indian music.