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The Conference of the Birds

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P.S.U. International Theatre Company
Presents
The Conference of the Birds

Adapted from the Epic by Farid Ud-Din Attar

April 27,28,29&30 8:00 PM
Pittsburg Memorial Auditorium



PSU INTERNATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY

INAUGURAL PRODUCTION

SPRING 1995

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

Based on the epic poem by

FARID UD-DIN ATTAR

stage version by

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIERE

adapted by

JOHN GREEN & STEPHEN TAYLOR

**A production of the Department of Communication
for**

**The School of Arts & Sciences
Pittsburg State University**

**The Performance runs for approx. 2 hrs
There will be one 15 minute intermission.**

**WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT TOGETHER, IF DON WILSON HAD NOT
BROUGHT US TOGETHER.**

Your colleague, friend and "PhD's Manager"
Pete Hamilton, Chair, Department of Communication.

"We Did It Together"

When asked to recall his most vivid memory of Pitt State Dr. Wilson said that it would always be "the people I have had the privilege to work with." He went on to conclude that the successes he had at PSU were accomplished because, "... we did it together."

I can think of no other phrase that captures the spirit and leadership style of Don Wilson, and the effect he has had on our community than the words, "... we did it together."

When others look at the "Wilson years" and see accomplishments, I see not so much what was done, but rather how they were done. Don Wilson came to us at a time of great divisiveness. Today Pitt State is as unified as any bunch of independent thinkers and strong willed "Gorillas" can be.

These past eleven years have seen a coming together of faculty and administration to work on common goals and common problems. As Don Wilson said during his press conference, "When I arrived the underground union newspaper announced that 'the new Regent's "lackey" takes office today.'" Now those same faculty salute that "lackey" and thank him for our renewed spirit and pride in our university.

Eleven years ago the Pittsburg community perceived our campus as a foreign land, a place to be avoided if possible. Today no other university enjoys a more positive relationship with its host community than does PSU. Don Wilson has created a perception of ownership and involvement with all of the citizens of Pittsburg and Southeast Kansas. Today Pitt State truly belongs to all of the citizens of this community.

From my own observations, eleven years ago many students felt that they were here because they were not good enough to go elsewhere. Today we find that almost all of our students list PSU as their FIRST choice of where to go to college. Our students are PROUD to be Gorillas and to be Pitt State students. Thanks to the PRIDE created by Don Wilson.

Finally, eleven years ago our campus and our community was indeed isolated from the rest of the world. Because of the drive and vision of Don Wilson we are now a much more culturally diverse institution. Don Wilson has helped replace the suspicion we often hold for those who are "different" with a genuine desire to understand our role in the global society. Don Wilson has brought together scholars from all corners of the world to form a unique setting that fosters and promotes human understanding and tolerance.

This show salutes Dr. Don Wilson for all that he has done. But what is more important than any accomplishment in enrollment increases, building additions or personal successes, is to always remember that ...

**WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT TOGETHER, IF DON WILSON HAD NOT
BROUGHT US TOGETHER.**

Your colleague, friend and "PhuD's Manager"
Pete Hamilton,, Chair, Department of Communication.

The International Company

The International Theatre Company has been created in order to celebrate annually the rich cultural diversity which exists at PSU, through the medium of live theatrical performance. The members of the 1995 acting company are:

Jason Abramowitz	(USA)	Junior: Dept. of Communication
Jason Blick	(USA)	Sophomor: Dept. of Psychology
Elizabeth Campbell	(USA)	Sen: Social Science & Foreign Language
Vonnie Corsini	(USA)	Graduate: Dept. of Communication
Nari Cha	(S. Korea)	Graduate: Dept. of Communication
Vanitha Chandrasegaram	(Malaysia)	Graduate: Dept. of Psychology
Bunny Chang	(Taiwan)	Graduate: Dept. of Technology
Rama Devi Chaturvedula	(India)	Graduate: Dept. of Art
Santhi Ganesan	(Malaysia)	Graduate: Dept. of Psychology
Ariel Gutierrez	(Argentina)	Sophomor: Dept. of Communication
Natalia Ivanova	(Russia)	Sen: Engineering Technology & Mathematics
Angela Jin	(Malaysia)	Senior: Dept. of Management & Marketing
Aimee Kennedy	(USA)	Senior: Dept. of Communication
Toshihide Kobayashi	(Japan)	Sophomor: Dept. of Communication
King-Hwa Lang	(Malaysia)	Graduate: Dept. of Psychology
Lael Meats	(USA)	Senior: Dept. of Psychology
Suresh Menon	(Malaysia)	Graduate: Dept. of Technical Education
Yuko Nakahara	(Japan)	Junior: Dept. of Communication
Lilian Ojeda	(Brazil)	Junior: Dept. of Communication
Jennifer Russell	(USA)	Senior: Dept. of Communication (MSSC)
Shir Way Siew	(Malaysia)	Soph: Dept. of Management & Marketing
Heather Swartz	(USA)	Sophomor: Dept. of Music
Wei-Yin Tsou	(Taiwan)	Senior: Dept. of Communication
Brian Walrod	(USA)	Freshman: Dept. of Communication
Wes Warlop	(USA)	Graduate: Dept. of Art
Koichi Yamashita	(Japan)	Senior: Dept. of Social Science

Staging The Conference of The Birds

The International Theatre Company is Pittsburg State University in microcosm - a group of thirty students drawn from Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Brazil, Argentina and the United States. This production is a practical realization of the University's declared mission to create an environment in which all students receive an education of the highest quality, informed by a global perspective.

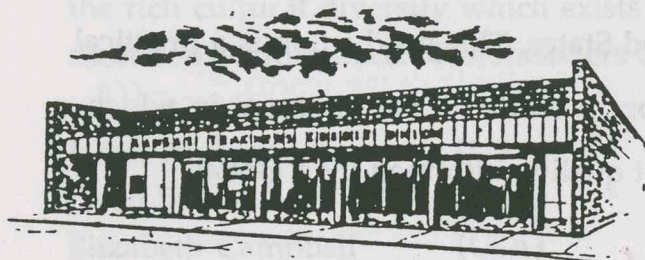
Part One of *The Conference of The Birds* was first performed at a scholars symposium on 'The Global Director' at the 1995 Mid America Theatre Conference in Kansas City on March 17; fragments of the play were also performed, with commentary by the actors, for 300 Speech Communication Students studying intercultural communication, on April 12. During these initial presentations which marked important stages along the way to tonight's performance, we discovered that the theme and content of the piece is truly universal, that it transcends all cultural and social barriers with ease.

The Sufi poet Attar belongs to a tradition in which the author himself struggles to serve a greater reality than that of his personal imaginings and ideas - he tries to infuse the conceits of his imagination with a universe that stretches far beyond it. In *The Conference of the Birds* as in many other myths and traditions, the visible world is presented as illusion, as shadow thrown upon a surface which is the earth. This is a universal truth of all theatre in all cultures. The theatre is a world of images, and theatre's glory is the conjuring up of illusions.

If the world is illusion, the theatre is illusion within illusion. On the one hand, as it's stated in *The Conference of the Birds*, when you turn toward the impression of life, you see life. But when you turn the other way, you see what is behind these illusions, and both the visible and the invisible worlds appear.

John Green

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Attar The Perfumer

Farid ud-Din Abu Hamid Muhammad ben Ibrahim was generally called Attar, *the perfumer*. Though little is known with certainty about his life, it seems that he was born in AD 1120 near Nishapur in North-West Persia (the birthplace of Omar Khayyam). The date of his death is uncertain but is given as about AD 1230, so he lived to be one hundred and ten years old. Most of what is known about him is legendary, even his death at the hands of a soldier of Ghenghis Khan. From his personal reminiscences scattered among his writings it seems that he spent thirteen years of his youth in Meshed.

According to one legend, Attar was sitting one day with a friend at the door of his shop when a Dervish (holy beggar) came by, looked in, smelt the sweet perfumes, then heaved a sigh and wept. Attar thought that he was trying to arouse their pity and asked him to go away. The Dervish said: "Yes, there is nothing to prevent me leaving your door and saying farewell to this world. All I have is my worn out *khirka* (patched cloak). But I grieve for you, Attar. How can you ever turn your mind to death and renounce all these worldly goods?" Attar replied that he hoped to end his life in poverty and contentment as a dervish. "We shall see," said the Dervish, and thereupon lay down and died.

This made such an impression on Attar that he left his father's perfume shop, became a pupil of the famous Shaikh Bukn-ud-din, and began to study, in theory and practice, the Sufi system of ideas. For thirty-nine years he travelled in many countries, studying in monasteries and collecting the writings of devout Sufis, together with legends and stories. He then returned to Nishapur where he lived for the remainder of his life. It was said that by creeping into Sufi ideas like an ant, he had reached a deeper understanding of them than anyone of his time. He composed about two hundred verses and many works in prose, the most famous of which in the West is, *The Conference of the Birds*.

Plot Synopsis

Part 1: The Conference

Summoned by the Hoopoe, all the birds of the air flock to a great conference. Once assembled, the Hoopoe informs them that the world is in spiritual chaos and that if they are going to be saved they must find their true king, The Simorgh. The birds debate the wisdom of the Hoopoe's plan, and she justifies her position by telling parables which illustrate such worldly problems as the fact that individual acts of obsessive loyalty or blind love can often prove disastrous. A number of the birds - the Parrot, the Duck, the Partridge, the Owl and the Peacock - refuse to accompany the Hoopoe on her quest, preferring instead to pursue their material interests. Having convinced the remainder of the birds of the importance and urgency of her quest, they agree to accompany her on her journey to the Kingdom of The Simorgh.

Part 2: The Journey

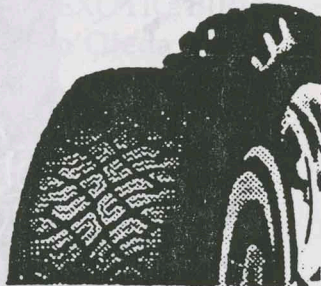
Led by the Hoopoe, the flock of birds fly across the world in search of the Kingdom of the Simorgh. As they cross a vast desert, they encounter a Bat, a Hermit and a Walking Bird, both of whom are engaged upon their own spiritual quests. Suddenly in the middle of their journey, the birds encounter the figure of Death disguised as an old man. Death tells them the riddle of the Phoenix and, encouraged by him, they experience a vision of their own mortal deaths and spiritual resurrection. During the vision they appear to fly through seven valleys - the Valley of Searching, the Valley of love, the Valley of Idols, the Valley of Annihilation, the Valley of Unity, the Valley of Amazement, and the Valley of Death. Whilst crossing the seven valleys, the birds encounter characters who pose various riddles concerning the human condition. As the vision fades, the birds find themselves in the Kingdom of The Simorgh.

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open
but there is neither
traveller
nor
guide*

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CAST

The Birds

HOOPOE
Lael Meats

DOVE
Santhi Ganesan

FALCON
Wes Warlop

SPARROW
Koichi Yamashita

FIRST EXOTIC BIRD
Lilian Ojeda

SECOND EXOTIC BIRD
Heather Swartz

PEACOCK
Elizabeth Campbell

OWL
Angela Jin

HERON
Ariel Gutierrez

PARROT
Toshihide Kobayashi

GUILTY BIRD
Natalya Ivanova

DOUBLE BIRD
Nari Cha

NIGHTINGALE
Jennifer Russell

DUCK
Jason Blick

PARTRIDGE
Shir-Way Siew

WALKING BIRD
Vonnie Corsini

PHOENIX
Aimee Kennedy

The Humans

INDIAN PRINCESS
Vanitha Chandrasegaram

DERVISH
Jason Abramowitz

CHINESE PRINCESS
Bunny Chang

WAITING WOMAN
Yuko Nakahara

HERMIT
Suresh Menon

OLD MAN
Brian Walrod

KING
Wei-Yin Tsou

HOLY WOMAN
Rama Devi Chaturvedula

CHAMBERLAIN
King Hwa Lang

All other roles doubled and tripled by the Cast

The Band

KEYBOARD/DIRECTOR
Stephen Taylor

KEYBOARD
Susan Laushman

GUITAR/VOCALS
Lem Sheppard

FLUTES
Justin Writer & Shelley Rae Thompson

PERCUSSION
Bob Laushman & Neil Bryan

TABLA
Manmeet Singh Gill

All other instruments played by the cast

DIRECTOR

MUSIC composed & arranged by

CHOREOGRAPHY

SET & LIGHTING DESIGN

BIRD PUPPET DESIGN

MASK DESIGN

COSTUME DESIGN

MAKE UP

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

STAGE MANAGER

SOUND

LIGHTBOARD OPERATOR

STAGE CREW

PROPERTY CHARGEHAND

SET CONSTRUCTION

SCENIC ARTIST

PUBLICITY COORDINATOR

PROGRAM DESIGN

VIDEO PROMOTION

POSTER DESIGN

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

BUSINESS MANAGER

PRODUCER

John Green

Stephen Taylor

Vanitha Chandrasegaram

Barry R. Bengtsen

Becky Trotter

Wes Warlop

Da'Lene DePriest

Scott Simpson

Jennifer Russell

Shawn Bowman

Lisa Dickey

Kyle McGuffin

Curtis Pasmore

Warren G. Anderson

Bob Cappucci

Aaron Newell

Gary Percy

Becca Madrid

Brian Bartlett

Matt Blackburn

Peter Flood

Richard Faith

Matt Hinton

Laurie Bailey

Cindy Clay

Jeff Abrams

Lilian Ojeda

Paul M. Summit

Linda Grilz

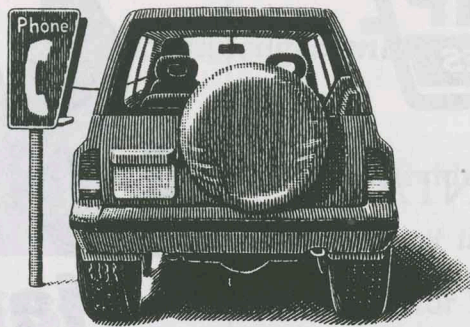
Bunny Chang

Santhi Ganesan

King Hwa Lang

Shirley Purdy

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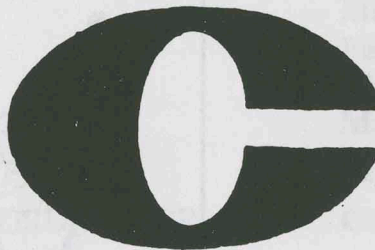


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Acknowledgements

The Company would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their help in realizing this staging of *The Conference of the Birds*:

Mr. Han of the Chinese Coordination Council (C.I.L) for North American Affairs, Kansas City Office, for the loan of Chinese Costumes; May Wagner of the Japanese Consulate, Kansas City Office, for the loan of the Ritual Drums; Vining Rentals, Independence Kansas for the Stilts; Barry Dean of Pitsco; KOAM TV; The Morning Sun; The Staff of Memorial Auditorium; The Office of the President of Pittsburg State University; PSU Printing Services; Department of Communication Advertizing and Public Relations Club; Dr. Paul Smith, Dr. Bert Patrick & The Department of Foreign Language; Dr. Shirley Drew and the Speech Communication program; Dr. Gene Vollen, Dr. Paul Huybrechts and The Department of Music; and Jennifer Schultz.



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This Bird Has Flown

One of the great challenges faced in staging this production was the representation of the birds themselves. We needed to find a method of staging which would enable the spectator to perceive the double image of the bird and the actor playing the bird simultaneously. Through long hours of rehearsal we created a range of bird images derived from Indian classical dance and folk dance and the Kabuki Theatre of Japan.

In Part One the actors portray a huge flock of birds arriving for the conference, by whirling colored flags which suggest the beating of countless wings. Once the birds have landed, the flags are discarded and each bird is represented through a hand gesture and a specific body movement. When, at the conclusion of the act, the birds assemble to fly off in search of the Simorgh (God), they dance into a frozen image of a fixed pose which in Indian folk dance represents a flock of Swans flying.

Part Two opens with the birds flying across the world in search of the Simorgh. This image is represented by the actors manipulating giant bird puppets (designed and constructed by local artist Becky Trotter), who momentarily efface the personalities of the actors. When the birds encounter the figure of Death and are held under his spell, the puppets are discarded as the physical embodiment of the birds, and are replaced by white spirit poles. These poles are an echo of the ancient divining poles used by shamans in traditional societies to make contact with the spirits in the upperworld and in the underworld, and from which the magic wand of the contemporary stage magician is derived. Finally, once the power of Death is broken by the spirit of the Simorgh, by the birds' recognition that the divine is in fact within them, they recall all their outward physical manifestations presented during the course of the play.

John Green

A note on Indian Dance

The majority of the unique movements and hand gestures executed by the Bird characters and the Indian Princess in *The Conference of the Birds*, are based on Indian Classical and Indian Folk dances. Most of the hand gestures mean something, describing either an emotional state, such as love, or a physical representation of a bird or animal. The hand gestures enable the characters to convey messages to the audience (especially when they speak a language other than English). You will be able to quickly guess the meaning of many of these hand gestures, even though you may not be familiar with the traditions from which they come.

The different dance movements are based on the Classical Indian dances: *Bharatha Natyam* originated from Tamil Nadu, *Odissi*, from Orissa, and *Kathak* from the States of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The differences between these dances can be noted in the style and movements of the dancer. The *Bharatha Natyam* is more rigid compared to the other two. It is more spiritual in nature. The most noted movement in this dance occurs when the dancer bends the waist and the knee. The *Odissi* is more sensual in nature. The most obvious movement is when the dancer bends the hips and sways the torso. The highlight of *Kathak* is a spinning movement in one spot at great speed. Hand gestures, facial expressions and intricate footwork is essential in varying degrees, in all of these dances.

Vanitha Chandrasegaram

The Music for Conference of the Birds

The music for this theatre piece comes from many different sources. Cast members sang and played folk songs for me - many of which you'll hear tonight - from China, India, Malaysia, Japan, Argentina, Russia, and other places. They also loaned me armfuls of tapes and compact discs, which gave me even more ideas.

I also knew early on that I wanted to involve music students in the production, so I asked my composition students to write music for the show. The music that accompanies the tale of clumsy thieves in Part I was composed by M.C. Whittier; Louise Glen wrote the haunting setting of Ecclesiastes, sung by the Second Exotic Bird (Heather Swartz), that closes the first half; Justin Writer and Shelley Rae Thompson contributed atmospheric flute solos - and since Justin and Shelley play in the band as well, their improvisations color the entire show.

What I've tried to do is tie together all these different sources into a whole, by using a main theme that appears throughout the show at important points, especially the beginning and the end. Sharing this mystical feeling are several other pieces - the Nightingale's setting of a Hopi Indian Chant (sung by Jennifer Russell); the dark music that opens Part Two, accompanying the birds on their arduous journey; the two songs the Hoopoe (Lael Meats) sings in Part Two.

Finally, the band makes all these ideas a reality. Each of them has been indispensable, but here I want to single out the guitarist Lem Sheppard, who has contributed some fine originals, including the Traveler's song sung by Vonnice Corsini towards the end of Part One, and the birds' lullaby, which he sings in Part Two.

Stephen Taylor

The Sufi System of Belief

The Conference of the Birds was written in the twelfth century by the Persian poet, Farid ud-Din Attar, in the form of an allegorical poem, based on the teaching of the Sufis, of whom Attar was considered one of the greatest.

The name *Sufi* is derived from *suf* (wool), and refers to the woollen robes worn by ascetics. The Sufis follow the inner teaching of the Koran. Together with a system of ideas based on the precepts of the sacred book, they have a practical method for working on themselves, which is taught orally. By means of exercises, postures and dances, the forces of man, which are continually being diverted away from himself, may be used and converted for inner development and the increasing of consciousness. The aim and end is union of the soul with God. The soul (in the sense of that higher part of man which longs for perfection) existed before the body and is confined in it as in a cage. Human life is a journey which is made in stages; and the seeker after God a traveller, who must make great efforts to overcome his weaknesses and faults, and to obtain true knowledge and understanding.

According to Sufi teaching, there is one God. All things are in Him and He is in all things. All visible and invisible, are emanations of Him. Religions, in themselves, are not important, though they may serve to lead men to Reality. Good and Evil, as we understand them, do not really exist, for everything proceeds from the One Being, God; at the same time, there is real good and real evil. Man is not free in his actions; he has no free-will, though this may be achieved through striving in the right way. He is turned this way and that way by interior and exterior forces - the sport of every wind that blows.

The World According to a Sufi

A Sufi woke one night and said to himself: "It seems to me that the world is like a chest in which we are put and the lid shut down, and we give ourselves up to foolishness. When death lifts the lid, he who has acquired wings, soars away to eternity, but he who has not, stays in the chest a prey to a thousand tribulations. Make sure then that the bird of ambition acquires wings of aspiration, and give to your heart and reason the ecstasy of the soul. Before the lid of the chest is opened become a bird of the Spirit, ready to spread your wings."

A man who loved God saw Majnun sifting the earth of the road and said: "Majnun, what are you looking for?"

"I am looking for Laila," he said.

The man asked: "Do you hope to find Laila there?"

"I look for her everywhere," said Majnun, "in the hope of finding her somewhere."

All that you have heard or seen or known is not even the beginning of what you must know, and since the ruined habitation of this world is not your place you must renounce it. Seek the trunk of the tree, and do not worry about whether the branches do or do not exist.

The Conference of the Birds
(translated by C.S.Nott)

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111 N. Broadway
232-9294

Dillons

2600 N. Broadway
232-3300