Let Us Proclaim the Apocalypse of Faith

1. Interfaith Conference

Monsignors filibuster world population.
Lamas in exile win valuable prizes!
Settlers will yet be avenged on the Hittites —
Wallace Fard's faithful prepare their bow ties.

Missionary Latter-Days invoke holy undergarb.
Druids park Range Rover convoys on ley lines.
Asahara transfers his gas to the A train.
Baha'is syncretize. Ayatollahs spill from their coffins.

2. New Masada, TX

The prophet picks out the riff from "Layla."
Emergency generators strain with feedback;
the chosen air-guitar atop guardposts.
ATF jackboots set up a backbeat.

Fifty-cal squirrel guns bristle from the wagons.
The prophet sets his Stetson, spittoons.
Back of the chapel he gathers the ladies:
"Baby, light my fire." Johnny Law locks and loads.

3. Drop-In Clinic

Youth-group conscripts picket outside.
Cameramen angle to cover their screens;
carpooling mothers mug outraged for interviews.
Ministers' sunglasses ogle their seams.

A welfare recipient greases the wall.
The doctor, dying, phones the police.
"To save that fetus, the Lord had to take it" —

smirking, the martyr proffers his wrists.

4. Louis E. Coira, Maj. Gen. USAF (Ret.)

Granddad wakes his dogs at dawn.
Deafness mutes their bays in his ear;
his hand darts sure to right his falls.
His eye plucks delicate quail from the air.

Granddad gnaws the faith of our fathers;
his children's households abandon their laws.
The Vatican's hardcover flowers and pablums.
The parish committee remodels the pews.

Alec Dinwoodie

MUSIC REVIEWS

Traces
Chris Ruhe's Chartreuse Blues
Masnaví: Improvisations on Spiritual Themes
Reliance
Merz
Various Artists and Labels (see below)
Reviewer: Simon Mawhinney

Kandinsky writes, "A painter who finds no satisfaction in mere representation…in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end."[1] In the reviews that follow, the efforts of several Bahá'í artists to realise "inner longings" is examined. All the artists discussed here are highly motivated, with little shortage of inspiration. However, the conclusion is reached that the music often fails to realise its inspirational potential. This is due mostly to technical achievements which are often quite impressive.[2]

Traces
Artist: Geoff and Michaela Smith
Sonrise Audio Duplication, 1999, UK19

The opening song, *Through the Valley,* is one of the most convincing musical versions of translated writings I have heard. A passage from The *Seven Valleys* has been set to music to create stanzas and chorus. The ametrical text has been grafted on to a metrical structure which convinces the ear that music and text were achieved simultaneously. However, with music of this nature the main problem is usually singing, and this arises notably after the chorus. A new verse begins at 2'10" with the words "The steed of this valley is pain." The singer (whose voice has a very flat timbre) attempts to ornament the word "is" and the result is quite embarrassing. A similar thing happens with the word "journey" on the next line. (And why did she decide to ornament the word "is" anyway?)

Of the second song, *Tamasha* the liner notes inform us, "Inspired by the grandson of Bahá'u'lláh who loved to go on outings with his grandfather. His death at the age of four was commemorated by a Tablet[3] in which Bahá'u'lláh described him as sightseeing in the next world." As I was unaware of this story, this song was especially memorable. Lucid lyrics commemorate this little known member of the holy household. The music is dreamily effective, with a sensitive use of guitars, but again the singing causes aural problems.

A further concern relates to the liner notes. A short note explaining the inspiration

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1 Quoted in Peter Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987) 5.

2 Throughout these reviews I have adopted a ratings chart, ***** (masterpiece) to * (poor), similar to that used in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8.

3 If this CD has a "non-Bahá'í" audience, the word "Tablet" may be confusing.

for the song often accompanies the lyrics. The fact that *Tamasha* was explained is very helpful, but in other cases, such as *The Whole Me*, the explanations are unnecessary and lack subtlety. Consider this explanation of *I Believe in You*, "I was blessed by a dream in which I was held in an enormous hand, cradled and told that everything would be all right." (Incidentally, in the chorus of this song the backing vocals intone the name of Bahá'u'lláh, but the resulting effect lacks taste.) Another example reads, "We are all born with potential talents, capacities and virtues that are deep within us like jewels in a mine. Shouldn't the goal of education be to bring these gems to the surface?" Of course, everyone agrees with this sentiment, which is as much common sense as "new" Bahá'í teaching, but it is quite unnecessary as an appendix to the song lyrics. It is rather like the Bahá'í T-Shirts which the public find so off-putting.

Interlude is a psuedo-Pink Floyd instrumental track which contains apparently sampled Sheila Chandra-style Indian singing. Now, we Bahá'ís are all world-embracing believers with multi-cultural families, but, once again, I must draw attention to the fact that stealing timbre and line (or plain sampling) from selected exotic cultures is orientalism of doubtful ethics.[4] It seems odd that people forget that the music of different civilisations has taken thousands of years to evolve separately. The inevitable connections between world musics as globalization continues cannot simply involve juxtaposition, but must occur at deeper structural levels.

Little Eyes was inspired by the death of James Bulger, a child from Liverpool who was murdered by two children a few years ago. This is a sincere effort but it sounds like an advertisement soundtrack. (As are the final tracks, *Tree of Unity* and the happy-clappy *One People One Planet* which features a children's chorus – wonderfully microtonal!)

The problem with this album is that the songs are well-written, but the singing is unsatisfactory. (Perhaps, like Dolly Parton's *I Will Always Love You* these songs will find their true expression in the future?)[5] **

Chris Ruhe's Chartreuse Blues
Artist: Chris Ruhe
Nine Partners Music BMI, 1996, NPM 5870

This is a quintessentially American work, with a very specific audience in mind. For those who are not interested in blues, or country, this album will prove rather difficult to like. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the recording is the liner notes:

> Thank you for buying my new album. My labor of love. Here it is, a

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4 There is a wealth of discourse on the subjects of orientalism and representation in music. A useful introduction to this debate is Nicholas Cook, *Music – A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

5 Some will doubtless feel that such analysis is misplaced nitpicking. There may be some truth in this, but I continue to reassure myself that the reason for illustrating such defects stems from a passionate belief that there exists an urgent need for greater critical acuity among the public when consuming cultural artifacts. We cannot expect masterful, pure forms of artistic discourse until we create a demand for higher levels of technical accomplishment.

> musical pastiche, some paint upon the canvas…bright splashes of color…two colors predominate…chartreuse…brilliant green of parrots wings, of mountain moss and secret wild Honduran callings of loud, raucous, muscley, rowdy life…mix it then with cobalt blue, of cold Magellanic ocean deeps, of nearnight skies, of gliding jays wings, of my love's eyes, of yon supine Appalachians, and there we sort of have it…my music, my chartreuse blues, (for youse). (yeah)
>
> Many wonderful musicians, all my friends, have contributed to this album … they range from 17 to 75 years old, and come in all shapes, sizes, and hues … all members of the ancient, noble tribe of music-makers … and, it is undeniable … we are products of history … all music comes from deep well-springs of human experience, from that age-old and unutterably profound drama that is our struggle upward … as we remember throbbing night drums, and slender flute trills in the high desert dawn …

It is quite a Terence Trent D'Arby-style piece of writing, rich with signification. It is difficult, however, to determine the connections between this vivid meandering prose and the staid music which accompanies it.

The opening track, *Life's a Highway*, demonstrates a typically unimaginative bass line which ruins the music. However, the bluesy track which follows, *Going Down to the River*, is quite evocative. Ruhe has used the word "neurosis" in his description of this track, and the use of a droning keyboard part helps reinforce this mood. The lyrics are strangely interesting: "Well I see four wasps dying on a window, but I don't lift a finger to help them. I know you won't understand." I was encouraged to hear a Bahá'í artist embracing negativity and dissonance – vital aspects of any healthy art.

The greatest difficulty with this music is the quality of the singing, the colour of the voice. The enunciation of lyrics is admittedly clear, but there is a distinct lack of strength or charisma. After a few tracks it becomes difficult to listen any further. Here is yet another example where guest singers would really help demonstrate the strengths of the song-writer.

Ultimately I couldn't help wondering why blues is so popular. It is bland and harmonically effete. There is no structural ambiguity, just fulfilled expectation. If you take one of these songs out of context maybe it will not do much harm. But if you try to listen to the whole album at one sitting, you quickly tire. The artist has written that "two colours predominate." That is the crux of the problem. **

Masnaví: Improvisations on Spiritual Themes
Artists: Kamran, Khodjasteh, Averill
IST, 1996, IST 0219

Reviewing a recording of Persian/Arabic chant is extremely difficult for a listener who does not understand the original languages. Fortunately, the recording is produced with the intention of reaching those who rely on translations. Detailed liner notes provide an avenue for approaching the chants, which are correctly identified as an "experience rather than a performance."

What you hear is very standard, such as you will have heard on numerous occasions. However, it is pleasing to be able to hear the textured verbal intricacy of the writings any time you wish. I was a little confused by the backing vocals which appear on some of the tracks. As far as I am aware, this rather distracting addition does not stem from middle eastern practice. It may be a potentially radical innovation, but I found it a little melodramatic. However, it underlines some key issues in this area of endeavour. As this form of chant evolved, it was not considered music, but a recitation of the text. It was not designed for mass marketing, nor for repeated listening. Therefore we cannot listen to it with musical ears. However, westerners find it nearly impossible to listen to a CD of "singing" in an unfamiliar language without a concept of "music" coming into play. I am fascinated by the challenges and difficulties brought about by this paradox.[6] ***

Reliance
Artists: Ben Koen and the Unity Ensemble
Qing Shan Music, 1997

When I observed that the group here was called "The Unity Ensemble," I was a little suspicious that their music would reveal itself to be emotion-drivel. However, I was pleased to find that my prejudices had been completely misplaced. *Reliance* turns out to be an accomplished piece of music making.

The initial track, *Preparation*, which is based on a single drone, immediately propels us into a unique soundworld. *Bathsheba* provides us with our first taste of their jazz style. It is an eclectic mix which suggests not only musicians such as John Coltrane, but also the European Quartet of Keith Jarrett, while the piano solos (with fistfuls of chords and inelegant spiky rhythms) are reminiscent of some McCoy Tyner.

Two of the tracks include sung extracts from The *Hidden Words*. These are wonderfully melodic settings in English. The singer, Destan Owen, has an attractive warm voice. The moving *Temple of Being* is a case in point. The music is very relaxed in all parameters (check out the stylistic parallels here with an album such as Jarrett's *Personal Mountains*). A particularly effective technique is the overlapping of solos which occurs at 1'44". It is not an original technique of course, but the context in which it is employed is very successful.

The recording is dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh. When we consider that earlier in the century jazz was roundly maligned for its decadence (for example by the Sufi musician Inayat Khan), it is fascinating to observe this musical language evolving to become of the vehicle of adoration. ***

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6 I can envisage an excellent way to present future recordings of this nature. CD-rom, or DVD-rom technology would make it possible to provide a recording which can also be "viewed" through a computer or television screen. In addition to the music the screen would provide the original Arabic text, plus a transliteration and a translation. In this manner listeners who do not understand the original language will be able to follow the words, and by reading transliteration and translation at once will get closer to an understanding of the chanted act. Besides, it will reward repeated listening.

Merz[7]
Artist: Merz
Epic, 1999, 495500 2Epic, 1999, 495500 2

Recently attracting a wave of media praise, Merz (aka Conrad Lambert) has been described as "one of the country's more original talents" with "a sound that is like no other."[8] This recently released album is a strikingly important contribution to the development of the Bahá'í Faith in the British Isles. Merz is potentially a prominent ambassador for the Faith, which must place him in a difficult position as he decides just how much (if at all) he should broadcast his religious adherence. If it is completely concealed that may be a lost opportunity. But if anyone caught even the faintest hint that his efforts are an attempt to "teach," then it would all come to nothing.

In producing this album, Merz is to be congratulated on getting the balance right. He has produced an album designed for public consumption. There is no explicit ecstatic celebration of Bahá'í identity.[9] His concern with musical expression, rather than proselytising, is very welcome. And yet, he does provide the URL of a Bahá'í website.[10] Further, his lyrics are replete with indirect references to his religious ideals. It might be tempting to discuss this music purely from the perspective of the artist as a Bahá'í. I feel such thinking would lack integrity, for it is important to discuss this album from a musical point of view. After all, it is on the musical level that Merz's public career will continue. It is a great pleasure to report that the purely musical response is for me a positive one. The songs are all well-written, both as music and text. The recording itself is attractively produced and mixed.

To describe the music is rather difficult, as the influences are so varied. Conrad Lambert's influences range across the gamut of contemporary music from Bob Dylan to Nine Inch Nails[11] – a range that has earned him the moniker "the British Beck."

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7 This Merz review was written with Shamim Razavi.

8 *The Guardian* newspaper, 29 July 1999.

9 We know that he is capable of this, see his *Heathrow Terminal 1 Revisited*, Seventh Valley, 1994, AVC250.

10 This is www.warble.com/bahai. I checked out this site and must admit that I don't feel it is a particularly good place for people to find out about the Faith. For example, one of the first pictures you get is a photograph of a youth-gang, with the caption, "Warriors of the Covenant." This website also contains articles on Huququ'llah and jokes about Persians. Outsiders will not only fail to understand these things but will probably feel alarmed and alienated. www.bahai.org would have been a much better choice.

11 This range of influences poses an interesting question as to how the nihilism of Trent Reznor's Nine Inch Nails (as heard on Merz's "asleep") can possibly combine with the Bahá'í teachings. The theoretical possibility of presenting the Bahá'í message through such abused media is to be relished. However, in practice, the diversity of styles makes for a somewhat uncomfortable sound. While the whole project is kept together by Conrad's larger than life personality and voice, one can't help feeling that this is more a sampler of Merz's prodigious talents than a holistic album-experience. In producing such a range of sounds and styles Merz has undoubtedly enchanted critics and the more discerning listeners but disappointing album and single sales reflect a failure to strike a chord with the wider listening public. While this reluctance to "sell out" is in itself no bad thing, old Conrad anthems such as "Awake" show that he is capable of combining popularism and spirit with a deft

Moreover, his Bahá'í influences are apparent throughout. This comes across not only in the "unity in diversity" of the eclectic range of musical styles found on the album or the upbeat and positive message found in lyrics like "the world is gonna be better" repeated ad infinitum on *Am (good morning)* but most interestingly in the almost subconscious influence of Shoghi Effendi's prose style on Conrad's poetry. We find echoes of Bahá'í prayers in "I'm alive, I was hopelessly dead" (cf. "I was as one dead, Thou didst quicken me with the water of life"[12]) on *Many weathers apart* and "never dwell on your wrongs" (cf. "I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life"[13]) on *Am (good morning)*. Who other than a Bahá'í would pen lines such as "we could do much better than being so fettered"? – Shoghi Effendisms such as "fettered" are scattered throughout Conrad's work. There is a strong element of dance in many of the tracks (as well as the overall timbre), but this overall characterisation is somewhat belied by the ballads. With a high degree of electronic programming, Merz is no guitar band (for which I am grateful.) For more detailed information on Merz's style and influences it is worth looking at his website, www.merz.co.uk (where the Bahá'í mentions are sensitive and mature.)

The most refreshing aspect of Merz's music is the subject matter of his lyrics. In a medium foetid with paeans to loves lost, found and lost again, Merz contemplates such esoteric themes as perseverance in a decaying world order ("I pray for strength in this trashed world" in *Engine heart*) and the process of spiritual awakening and becoming a Bahá'í (as heard on *cc conscious* and in particular the line "once they've got your name you're in wicked company"). Moreover, he makes comments that can surely only be fully appreciated by a Bahá'í audience with lines such as "dream of the Master, believe in the future" (*Asleep*) and the tongue-in-cheek take on Bahá'í marriages in *Lovely daughter* ("your father loves me your mother loves me you're very prestigious I've studied your family tree").

It remains to outline a few of the more interesting aspects of the album. *Forsake* is an example of a well-written, moving song – a three minute whisper whose elusiveness cannot be explained, notwithstanding the power of amplification. Merz's unusual voice has fascinated his listeners, and he uses its idiosyncrasies to great effect here; an example is the subtle ornamentation on the word "worry" at 0'42". Later in the song electronic modification endows the voice with an echo-style effect as if in a huge acoustic. The music is vocalise at this point (the text has already been sung), but greatly aids the emotive strength of the composition. One of the great strengths of the entire album is the highly sensitive arrangements. Merz's attention to surface detail puts many other artists to shame.

Starlight night is a curious track. The string writing is notably adept, with its use of portamento, tremoli, and pizzicato bass. Note the use of portamento to highlight the words "grey lawns." It is an obvious idea to use a string orchestra to accompany a Romantic lyric, but here it could be interpreted as a sort of postmodern nostalgia. The pathos of the music, the sense of a lost idyllic era, is enriched by the electronic effects, which add a dystopian touch. Taken together, this song is a rather complex text. Merz's voice merely adds to the mystery.

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artistic touch if he so chooses.

12 *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 20.

13 *Ibid*., 152

As a listener, I am always interested in the second listening. Will repeated hearings of a piece of music continue to hold interest? To create enduring musical interest, it is important not only to achieve a high degree of technical expertise; the compositions themselves must be sufficiently complex or ambiguous as to provide an endless network of structural/expressive revelations. It is a delight to confirm that these Merz tracks seem to hold this promise. The songs combine both an attractive surface detail with intricate musical construction. In *engine heart*, there is an intricate relationship between the lyrics and the musical construction. The lyrics have imagery of automated emotion, the engine heart. The imagery is welded to the processes of the music, which is constructed from a number of basic instrumental layers that overlap and interrelate with one another. The haunting effect of this song is due partly to its harmonic structure, which is centred around D minor. The modal nature of the melodic lines stimulates musical memories that extend through cultures and centuries. This track, perhaps more than any other in the album, demonstrates a compelling balance of simplicity, intricacy, and ambiguity. ****

FILM REVIEW

Film: *Festen (The Celebration)*
Director: Thomas Vinterberg
Distributors: Nimbus Film, Denmark
Reviewer: Jonathan Ledgard

There are moments in *Festen (The Celebration)* when all that has been simply disintegrates. Nothing can ever be the same again. Paternal loyalties fall away, and truth turns in new and unsettling directions.

It is summertime, hot and yellow in the Danish countryside, and the Klingenfeldt clan gather to honour the sixtieth birthday of the patriarch, Helge, at his elegant country house hotel. They have barely begun to enjoy the evening banquet when Helge's eldest son, Christian, is invited to make a toast and reveals that his father is in fact a paedophile, whose relentless sexual abuse of Christian and his twin sister, as children, drove her to suicide and him to despair.

The camera work here is jittery and grainy. The sound is stripped of any musical score. It was shot for little money, on videotape, in Danish, with a cast unrecognisable outside Scandinavia, yet it is so compelling that when Helge blurts out his admission over brandy, that he raped the twins because that was all they were good for, it feels like a punch. Actions here have consequences that ripple out, seemingly forever. After watching the film, critics have noted, audiences often sit in silence, stunned at the emotional violence of it all.

Although *Festen* received considerable acclaim, including the 1998 Prix De Jury at Cannes, the director, Thomas Vinterberg's name appeared nowhere on the credits. That, along with the film's distinctive look, was a stipulation of Dogma rules. In 1995, Lars Von Trier, the acclaimed Danish director of *Breaking The Waves*, had an idea for this new style of film making. He called up his friend, Mr Vinterberg, and the two of them drew up a list of how a film should be made. "It was easy," Mr Vinterberg admitted, "we just listed all the things we hated about modern cinema."[14] A so-called vow of chastity was drawn up with which all Dogma films had to comply. There were to be no genre movies, no superficial action, no flashbacks, no added lighting, no props brought in, no make-up, no camera filters, no added sound. Directors would receive no credit. Most importantly, the entire film would be shot with a handheld camera.

Dogma was a cinematic rescue operation, Mr Vinterberg said. "We wanted to purge film so that once again the inner lives of the characters justified the plot." Dogma films make no presumption of what an audience will like. The audience itself, Mr Vinterberg pointed out, does not know what it wants. The entire philosophy brings to mind a comment Aki Kaurismaki, the great Finnish film director, once made. "If you tune a film down to a minimalist level," he said, "the striking of a match is drama." Dogma offers fiscal hope for a more diverse and independent cinema. Instead of expensive pyrotechnics and special effects, a Dogma production needs only a video camera, a cast, and a script. But it is risky. To succeed at all a Dogma

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14 Quotations are from a personal interview by the reviewer with Thomas Vinterberg.

film has to be exquisitely crafted.

The many are no more justified in silencing the one, John Stuart Mill reminded us, than the one is in silencing the many. The justice meted out in *Festen* by Christian's clumsy, courageous revelation, is brutal. Helge is destroyed as a father and a grandfather; his wife is revealed as a betrayer of her own children, a hypocrite who covered up his crimes. You shall know the truth, the Bible says, and the truth shall set you free. For Christian, the surviving victim, a burden is lifted. His sister appears to him in a dream. Shall I come with you, he asks her, offering suicide. No, she replies, smiling.

Were justice "to shed its light upon men," Bahá'u'lláh tells us, "the face of the earth would be completely transformed." In topographical terms, perhaps, at a cinematic stretch, we can see injustice as a flooding sea, a watery deep of lies, greed, fear, and the abuse of power. The face of the "just" earth, drained of injustice, might be an exposed sea floor, an alien place studded with the skeletal shipwrecks of foundered relationships, frightening in its candour, but not we hope too salty for a fresh blanket of meadows and nature's rebirth. The extended Klingenfeldt family, gathering for breakfast the next morning, seem drained by Helge's terrible admission. Exhausted, disorientated and scared, they tread the floor of their own freshly drained sea.

Bernard Leach, Potter
Biographical Sketch[15]

In order for a potter to begin to throw a perfectly balanced shape, there is one critical routine to be performed - that of "centring" the lump of clay on the wheel. Bernard Leach wrote that: "The clay spins like a top, seeming to prefer the centre of the wheel to any other position, but if the onlooker tries his hand his first discovery is that the clay actually has a preference for any other place than that. So the first thing a beginner has to do, before there can be any question of making shapes at all, is to learn how to centre the clay and keep it centred."[16]

The life of Bernard Leach revolved around just such a centre. From his earliest years, he identified the centre of life as "Spiritual Energy (God)." Later, in the aftermath of the Second World War, he realised that the key to a harmonious and peaceful future was the "replacement of self at the centre of the circle by 'The Other Power' – God."[17] The act of throwing thus became a metaphor for the unique soul, centred in God, allowing itself to become malleable so that His will might use it as a vehicle through which to operate. Leach's lifelong commitment to the coming together of east and west was reinforced by his belief in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. But this acceptance and devotion came hard to him, after years of agnosticism, dabbling with eastern spirituality, and doubt.

Bernard Howell Leach was born in Hong Kong on 5 January 1887. His father was a judge, his mother died in childbirth. Shortly after he was born, he was sent to Japan to live with his grandparents, until his father remarried. At school, Leach showed a talent for drawing and in 1903, he went to study at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks, transferring later to etching classes at the London School of Art. During this period, freed from his Roman Catholic background, he opted for agnosticism. At the Slade he formed a lifelong friendship with the painter Reginald Turvey who would also in later years become a Bahá'í.

In the spring of 1909, Leach returned to Japan. For two years, he drew, painted and tried to introduce etching to Japanese artists. He married his cousin, Muriel, built a house and lived on an income from his father's will and remained in Japan for the best part of eleven years. It was in 1911 that Leach's much-reported epiphany with pottery occurred at a *raku* party. Here, guests were invited to decorate pots which were then immediately plunged into a burning kiln to be fired. Leach was entranced by the process, amazed that the pots did not explode. Through the craft of pottery, he sensed a way could be found to transfer the values and techniques of the past into the future, bringing east and west together, allowing the artist to have a wholesome impact on people's lives in a mechanised society. Leach was suspicious of industrial methods and blamed them for the destruction of spiritual values in society. It was during this period that Leach developed his fundamental philosophy about east and

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15 Adapted from the introduction to *Spinning the Clay into Stars – Bernard Leach and the Bahá'í Faith*, ed. by Robert Weinberg (Oxford: George Ronald, 1999).

16 Leach, *A Potters Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) 71.

17 Leach, *My Religious Faith* (London: NSA of the Bahá'ís of the UK, 1987).

west. To him, the West embodied materialistic values, an over-emphasis on the intellectual and the mechanical, while the east represented spirituality and intuition. Coincidentally, it was during this period also that Leach first encountered the Bahá'í Faith through the person of Agnes Alexander, who had been encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to pioneer to Japan. Leach asked her why she was there, to which she replied, "You will not understand, but I came because a little old Persian Gentleman asked me to come."[18]

When Leach returned home in 1920, he hoped that he could introduce his newly discovered enthusiasms into England. He wanted his pottery to be appreciated in the same way as fine art was and saw himself fundamentally as an artist-potter. He was accompanied to Britain by Hamada and the two men set about founding the Leach pottery at St. Ives in Cornwall. The lack of suitable raw materials in the area meant that the challenges were immense but they forged ahead, building a traditional wood-fired eastern kiln consisting of three chambers.

Leach was shocked by the lack of interest in artist pottery in England. Their work was criticised as precious and eclectic, at worst dull. Soon, out of financial necessity, Leach was forced to reinvent himself more as a functional potter, initially opting for tile production but later moving into a whole range of ware for use in the home. For the rest of his life, he would promote a philosophy by which the potter, in the repetition of similar shapes and forms, expanded his true spirit at the expense of the lesser ego. The Leach Pottery began to take on students who carried out much of the production work. More than a hundred pupils worked in the pottery over the decades.

Leach, however, longed to reconcile the dilemma he faced between his beliefs about the value of pottery as an art form and the necessity of producing a range of functional items for the home to ensure a regular income. His marriage to Muriel was also running into difficulties and increasingly he felt the need to break away. What appeared to be the perfect solution was offered when he was invited to set up a pottery in 1932 at Dartington Hall in Devon, an experimental community founded by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhurst who hoped to integrate education, arts and crafts with the agricultural work on their large estate. The Elmhirsts were also fascinated by oriental thinking and practices and Dartington became a magnet to all manner of creative minds. It was here that Leach began a devoted friendship with the American painter Mark Tobey, a practising Bahá'í.

The two men talked especially about Tobey's belief in Bahá'u'lláh. "After my loss of faith at about the age of eighteen," wrote Leach, "following a long period of uncertainty, this was more than I could take."[19] Nevertheless Leach read the Bahá'í literature which Tobey had given to him and went to meetings of the Bahá'ís which deeply challenged him. In 1934, the Elmhursts, seeing how close Tobey's friendship with Leach had become, gave Tobey the funds to accompany him to the orient. After a week in Hong Kong, the two friends separated, Tobey stopping in Shanghai while Leach went to Japan, where Tobey later joined him. There Tobey studied calligraphy and painting, writing, poetry and meditation. During the period while they were apart, Leach realised that the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith were totally "without egocentricity." "I found myself convinced, almost against my will, that the absence of

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18 *Ibid.*

19 Leach, *Beyond East and West* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978) 164.

self implied the presence of Truth – the Universal 'I am that I am.'"[20] Leach saw this realisation as a door opening between Buddhism and Christianity, between east and west but he still struggled with the concept of Bahá'u'lláh's claim to being a manifestation of God. It was not until 1940, at a public meeting in Torquay, Leach asked the speaker Hasan Balyuzi whether it was sufficient to consider Bahá'u'lláh as a "spiritual genius." Balyuzi replied "Yes" at which point Leach "declared" his faith in Bahá'u'lláh.

Returning to England in 1936, Leach moved permanently to Dartington with his secretary Laurie Cookes who would become his second wife. His son David continued to run the St. Ives pottery allowing his father time to concentrate on writing a book on pottery making which became a bible for the ceramicist's art and is still in print today, *A Potter's Book*. During the years of the second world war, Leach was in the privileged position to be able to keep the St. Ives pottery running in spite of the fact that many of its workers were conscripted. At the end of the war, this gave him the great advantage of being able to satisfy the boom in consumer demand and supply the major London department stores with pottery which was attractive and refreshing to customers who had become bored with the plainness of wartime products. Leach also became a member of a national committee looking after the interests of craftsmen. Consequently, Leach had an enormous impact on the standards and ethics of the British craft movement. The outcome of these reforming endeavours in the 1940s was the establishment of the Crafts Centre of Great Britain which received an annual grant from the government.

1948 saw Leach's second marriage in trouble. Despite having formally accepted the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith, Leach had not yet fully come to terms with the claims of Bahá'u'lláh as a divinely-inspired Messenger from God. He was open about his belief in the teachings with his close friends and colleagues but, "there remained a hidden wavering" on the issue of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, "which undermined my activity."[21]

In 1950 Leach travelled in the United States for four months at the invitation of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Washington. While there he met a young potter named Janet Darnell who subsequently became the third Mrs Leach. The immediate post-war years meant good business for the Leach Pottery, and Leach found time to develop further his theories of the contribution potters might make to society. A turning point in his thinking occurred in July 1952 when he organised the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles at Dartington.

Leach hoped the conference would raise the issues which confronted craftsmen in contemporary society and what they could do to transform society. What he found however was a sudden awareness of how small a group of people he was expecting to change the world through the integrity of crafts. As a result, he found his wavering on the Bahá'í Faith was broken down. He came to understand more fully that individualism does not answer the communal need and that unity was the only solution to meeting the needs of society and ensuring survival. "I believe that Bahá'u'lláh was a Manifestation and that His work was to provide the spiritual foundation upon which the society of mankind could be established," he wrote to his

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20 *Ibid.*, 165.

21 Leach, *Religious Faith*.

friends and associates, "In becoming a convinced Bahá'í, the only discarding of slowly gathered convictions has been the replacement of self at the centre of the circle by... God – and the result has been strange, for the jigsaw pieces begin to fall into place – seemingly by themselves."[22] Leach's religious sentiments were even more stirred when in 1954, he was able to make a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í holy places in Israel and personally meet with Shoghi Effendi. His experience praying in the shrines had a profound effect on him, reinforced his feeling that he should step up his efforts to unite east and west, and return to the Orient to "try more honestly to do my work there as a Bahá'í and as an artist..."[23]

Leach planned to move with Janet to Japan leaving the St. Ives pottery in the hands of his sons, David and Michael. However, both sons left to set up their own potteries and Janet took charge of the day to day running of St. Ives, thus freeing Bernard up to concentrate on his art pieces, exhibiting, travelling and lecturing.

The remaining two decades of Leach's long life were filled with activity – exhibitions throughout the world, the accumulation of awards, honours and honorary degrees. The marriage to Janet was not an altogether happy one either but they remained united by their interest in Japan, and their mutual respect endured.

As his life drew to a close, Bernard Leach was increasingly horrified by the world's nuclear arsenals and the implications of the Cuban missile crisis. He felt instinctively that he should use his position of fame and respect to speak out on the Bahá'í solutions to the world's problems. Thus the octogenarian Leach spent his mornings working on articles and books, and would arrive at the pottery in the afternoon to make his pots. As his eyesight failed in the early 1970s, it did not frustrate him to the extent that people might have expected. For Leach, it was almost a release and he was no longer torn between potting and developing his writing on religious matters. He accepted his loss of sight as the will of God. He died in 1979, aged 92, following a major retrospective exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the publication of his memoirs *Beyond East and West*.

Leach's death was widely reported throughout the world. On hearing of his death, the Universal House of Justice sent a cable saying "HONOURS CONFERRED UPON HIM RECOGNITION HIS WORLDWIDE FAME CRAFTSMAN POTTER PROMOTER CONCORD EAST AND WEST ADD LUSTRE ANNALS BRITISH BAHAI HISTORY AND HIS EAGER WILLINGNESS USE HIS RENOWN FOR SERVICE FAITH EARN ETERNAL GRATITUDE FELLOW BELIEVERS."[24]

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22 *Ibid.*

23 Letter from Bernard Leach to Reginald Turvey, 25 January 1955, reproduced in Johnson, *Reginald Turvey: Life & Art* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1986) 55.

24 Trudi Scott, "Bernard Leach" in *The Bahá'í World* Vol. XVIII (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986) 671.