

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS
PHILADELPHIA FESTIVAL SPREADS MESSAGE OF PEACE
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Nearly 100 Philadelphia SGI-USA youth, along with a 23-member Boys and Girls Group chorus, presented “Peace, a Musical Production,” for an enthusiastic audience of SGI members, family and friends, Oct. 27. The ambitious production, which featured song, dance and music performances, was woven together with dramatic narrative pieces to communicate a common theme: peaceful dialogue, not conflict, is the correct response to violence.

Even though the production, which spawned two performances that played to nearly 2,000 audience members, was planned and rehearsed over a five-month period, the events of Sept. 11 seemed to add a heightened sense of purpose to the gathering. This feeling was summed up by one of the performers, Connie Utada, who said: “[Since the attacks,] people seem to be of one mind-set of confusion and revenge. We really wanted to encourage people and show them there is a voice for peace, that a culture of peace can be attained.”

The opening of the production featured the reading of congratulatory messages from U.S. Congressman Bob Brady, City Councilman Howard Cohen and Mayor John Street, who proclaimed Oct. 27 SGI-USA Day in Philadelphia.

SGI-USA Philadelphia Region Women’s Leader Doris Edwards said she was very encouraged by the production, especially because the youth spearheaded all aspects of the endeavor. “This was entirely a youth-driven event and I believe they really propagated Buddhism to a lot of people through their efforts,” she explained.

Crystal Wearick of Mullica Hill, N.J., a high-school student who attended as a guest, said she was impressed by the production’s message. “The message of peace was especially [appropriate] considering what’s going on right now,” she said.

Her neighbor and friend, Julie Praetzel, added that the three-act play did an excellent job depicting the kinds of conflicts that can arise at school. “The kids in the performance,” she said, “seemed really connected and communicated [through their songs and dances] an important message.”

As for the vision of the SGI-USA youth in Philadelphia, Elekeu Roho Correll is perfectly clear: “Youth are the future and we want to hand down peace—this is just the beginning.”