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## ARTS

### ■ SONGS WITH A MESSAGE

## Doah creates music outside the mainstream

*New Hampshire 'new age' group seeks to share global vision*

By Tom Long  
Globe Staff

KEENE — Doah World Music Ensemble creates music for the global village.

The New Hampshire-based "new age" quintet performs an hypnotic blend of traditional and contemporary music on instruments as exotic as the balofon, adodo, biwa and charango and as familiar as the electric guitar and saxophone.

It is music outside the mainstream in which African chants, Spanish flamenco and medieval minstrel songs blend with modern pop and jazz. Music at once classic and contemporary, acoustic and electronic. Music with a message infused with the optimistic spirit of its members' Baha'i faith.

"We believe we are all one people," says Randy Armstrong, who founded the group with partner Ken LaRoche in 1974, "and we believe that by using instruments from different cultures we can bring ourselves and our listeners closer to the people of those countries. World peace is possible only through communication. We communicate through music."

Doah's music is a kaleidoscope of exotic contrasts. The fragile strains of an Indian flute waft eerily over electric guitar licks. The tinnabulation of bells and chimes mixes readily with synthesized harmonics. Thunderous drum beats introduce startling silences.

During a recent concert at Keene State College, Armstrong, LaRoche and company shared the stage with more than 70 instruments. The exotic array of equipment included



Marty Quinn, Volker Nahrman, Ken LaRoche, Charlie Jennison and Randy Armstrong (from left) of Doah.

Indian tabla drums, South American kalimba, stand-up bass, synthesizer, flutes and an assortment of rattles and bells. The balofon, a large, marimba-like log instrument from West Africa was prominent.

The five members of the group constantly switched instruments to create a rich blend of international folk music, jazz and pop that they refer to as world music. Though their improvisations sometimes meandered self-indulgently, the band was crisp, often inspired, as it clipped through an upbeat, three-hour set.

The titles of the compositions — "Crystal Strain," "One World Symphony," "Companions of the Crimson Colored Ark" — were indications of both the band's faith and its new-age mindset.

The band recently signed a four-record recording contract with Global Pacific Records.

"It's an associate label of CBS Records," says Armstrong. "Our first album will be released on Oct. 18. It's called 'World Dance.'"

They have also changed the spelling of their name.

"For years people wanted to know if Do'a stood for 'dead on arrival,'" explains Armstrong. "We waited 15 years to see if it would blow over, but it hasn't. To make matters worse, there's now a punk rock group called DOA. So we started spelling it Doah. But no matter how you spell it, it still means the same thing: 'A call to prayer' in Arabic.

"The new record deal means a new beginning for us," he adds, "and we're excited about it. But it's not the money we're excited about. It's reaching a new audience. This is not just a job to us. This is a way of life."