

DO'AH

To The Rhythm Of 'World Dance,' They're Breaking Musical Barriers

By STEVE VARNUM
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Randy Armstrong says bearing his band, DO'AH, on record simply can't be compared to seeing them perform.

Not that the guitarist doesn't like their latest album, *World Peace*, which happens to be their most successful to date.

Armstrong says it's just that "When you come to a DO'AH concert, the first thing you see is a stage with an incredible amount of equipment on it. And the dynamics of improvisation and how we play the concert and interact with the audience, you can't capture on an album."

Or as a *Monitor* editorial put it in January, after the band's First Night shows, in performance: "DO'AH rocks."

Music lovers whose appetites were whet this year by the band's New Year's Eve show and one at the Capitol Theatre in April, can catch the DO'AH experience in a free Concord Recreation and Parks Dept.-sponsored concert Thursday night from 7 to 9 at Bicentennial Square.

It has been a busy spring for the band's members, three of whom live in Lee and one in Peterborough. They sandwiched a handful of New England dates around tours of California and Alaska, while *World Dance*, their fifth album,

hit Top 10 charts for New Age and Adult records.

Some of that success was due to a switch in record labels. DO'AH, whose first four albums were on an independent label, switched to Global Pacific Records, a CBS affiliate, and got the benefit of that company's promotional boost.

But DO'AH has also managed to blend its lush instrumental sound and "world music" rhythms at a time when artists are crossing over in all directions in popular music. In the '60s, the Beatles incorporated the sitar into their music and Santana injected Latin rhythms into Top 40 radio. Now it's Paul Simon doing world

"Graceland" tours and Sting fusing jazz and rock.

"I think there was a movement going on in this country, beginning in the late '60s and all through the '80s, where contemporary instrumental music, including jazz, has been gaining stronger appreciation in this country," says Armstrong.

"DO'AH falls into a lot of categories, so what we've been able to do is cross over into many different markets. . . . We've played in jazz festivals, we've been on fine arts series, we do a lot of work at universities. And as a duo, we've (he and Ken LaRoche) gone out into the folk market."

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That acceptance, combined with what Armstrong calls "a strong world community, an awareness of other cultures" has led to the formation of whole new categories of music - the world music (generally defined as blending musical languages - the rhythms, melodies and instruments - of different cultures), contemporary instrumental music, contemporary jazz, and new age bins in which DO'AH's records and discs are found.

Then again, it seems Armstrong and Ken LaRoche have been musically ahead of their time since they began performing as a guitar and flute duo in 1974. From the outset, they shared a passion for collecting instruments from around the world (their collection now numbers about 400; they use 75 in concert) and delicate, classical-sounding music.

In 1984, with the release of their fourth album, they added percussionist Marty Quinn, Charlie Jennison on saxophone, and John Hunter on bass (Volker Nahrman replaced Hunter in 1986). And with LaRoche dabbling on keyboards, DO'AH (then D'oa World Music Ensemble) began incorporating synthesizers and expanded into a more orchestrated sound.

In its latest albums, DO'AH has begun to add vocals, but not in the traditional song sense. Instead, DO'AH has explored the voice as yet another instrument, incorporating chants into their rhythms. On *World Dance*, the three-part "One World Symphony" includes the word "peace" sung in 39 languages.

Much of the album, composed in 1986 for the United Nations International Year of Peace, said Armstrong, was inspired by "The Promise of World Peace," a statement issued to the leaders and the people of the world by the Universal

House of Justice, Haifa, Israel.

"It was a musical response to that statement and a contribution to the United Nations Year of Peace effort," said Armstrong. They toured the U.S., Canada and India, performing and distributing peace literature and information before going into Blue Jay recording Studio in Carlisle, Mass. to record *World Dance*.

"We are very active as individuals and as a group in promoting and doing benefits for everything from human services to peace awareness activities," said Armstrong.

"You could say we're musical humanitarians."

But don't say they're a New Age band. Armstrong feels they've moved beyond that label.

"The whole term 'New Age' wasn't even in existence when we started using it. We started calling it New Age music in 1975 where there was no category, no Billboard chart of New Age music," he said.

"It was in 1981 that we decided to call it World Music. The New Age thing was becoming very commercialized, in the sense of what we thought New Age was, which was an expression of the oneness of humanity and also how we can work better together as human beings and learn more about ourselves through music. That's where we were coming from at that time as 'New Age artists.'"

"So we try to stay away from as many categories as we can. We call it DO'AH music. I feel all music should be looked at for its individuality, personally. It's really between the listener and the artist."

"You gotta have your bin. We were in dozens of bins, you know, from folk music to jazz, to international music, you name it. And this was before there was a New Age bin."

"At least there's a place to put it now."

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