

[My Meeting With The Musical Mystics](#)

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Hindu yogis, Buddhist tantrics, Sufi poets, gypsy minstrels - any attempt to cage the Bauls in a category fails. Joyous, happy, they roam free.

Fields of flowers, streams, green meadows and arched trees bask in the morning sun of Poetry Park, Rotterdam, Holland. HINDUISM TODAY reporter Maria Westerwoudt is strolling about, looking for four, rainbow-garbed Bauls who are to perform in this typically Dutch cultural sanctuary dedicated to the arts of the world. Maria's journal reads: "July 3, 1990: Here I was going to meet the Bauls for the first time, a few days before my formal interview. I didn't know what to expect. Then I see them standing outside the big concert tent. We namaskar. For a few minutes I don't know what to do next. They speak only maybe 10 words of English. We all go inside. Next I am meeting Mr. Mukherjee, their agent and close friend. We start talking. In the presence of the Bauls I feel no barriers at all. The whole time was like being home. I try to talk to them. When I mention India, Vasudevdas kindly gives me a photo of his with an invitation to visit his village in India.

"Later. They are in concert, performing for an audience of about 200. Their music captivates me in a "going along" spirit. In the break, many people crowded to talk with them. They are very open, joyous. So radiant and happy.

"July 8: Five days later, Ghent, Belgium. The Yellow Hall. My formal interview. I'm early and in the hallway with the crew. Vasudevdas see me and smiles cheerfully. We go into their dressing room. The atmosphere is joy. I offer a gift of home-made Indian sweets. They suddenly leave and quickly return, wearing necklaces with multi-colored, plastic stones. We all laugh - me them, their friends. So much genuine affection and love. It's still with me."

The Baul's infectious euphoria is real, and for rural Bengali villagers it's one of life's purest intoxicants. Though numbering only in the thousands, this musical sect traces its roots back to the 16th century Vaishnava saint, Chaitanya - revered as the first Baul. Since they like a sponge, they have soaked up a spectrum of belief and practice, the final organism defying any orthodox label. They revere the guru, but consider the real guru is within. Some scale the razor-edged path of Hindu/Buddhist tantric sexual yoga as a path to the divine, but dismiss crude indulgence as a path downward. Bauls cling to the ruddy energy of life and shy from temples, rituals and scripture. Singing and dancing, families travel village to village. Food comes to them easily. Many are hatha yoga adepts of the Natha school. Their earthy/spiritual verse fueled the literary furnace of Rabindranath Tagore. Bauls of Hindu origin dress in quilted red, orange or yellow tunics, are clean-shaven and sometimes wear a turban or have the hair tied in a knot on the top of the head. Those of Mohammedan background wear a white tunic, multi-colored waistband and beard. And all wear bright crystal, lotus seed or coral necklaces that sparkle on their chests like outer glimmerings of the pure light of the "ten million moons" they seek within.

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