

music, tasty food, fabulous stories of eternal worlds, and all the satisfactions a newcomer to the spiritual journey could ever hope to find.

Nonetheless, working only for his own salvation did not appeal to George. He was more a doer than a talker, and he looked for opportunities to put his convictions to work. Producing records with spiritual messages provided an ideal way for him to make use of both his musical skills and his influence with the record industry. In 1970, he released “My Sweet Lord,” inspired by the Edwin Hawkins Singers’ “Oh Happy Day,” a gospel classic that featured a chorus repeating the song’s title over and over. George wrote a choral line using the word “Hallelujah” as the refrain, and then switched midway to the phrase “Hare Krishna.” At the end of the song, he included an entire prayer in honor of those teachers who bring wisdom into the world:

gurur brahma, gurur vishnu, gurur deva maheshwara
gurur sakshat, parabrahma, tasmai shri gurave namah.

“I offer homage to my guru,” the prayer says, “who is as great as the creator Brahma, the maintainer Vishnu, the destroyer Shiva, and who is the very energy of God.”

Devotees and scholars familiar with ancient mantras were stunned to hear one chanted to a Ringo drumbeat.

Mantras with a gospel rhythm proved to be an inspired combination. “My Sweet Lord” skyrocketed to number one on both the UK and US charts and stayed there for months. As a result, letters addressed to George Harrison poured into the London temple from all parts of the world. It seemed a lot of people had been waiting for someone to validate their own search for God, and from the day “My Sweet Lord” was released thank you letters started coming and never stopped.

“I still get letters from people,” he said in the 1980s, “so I know by the Lord’s grace I am a small part in the cosmic play.”

Another opportunity to put his spiritual energies to work came along in 1971. East Pakistan had recently declared independence from West Pakistan and renamed itself Bangladesh. War between the two states broke out and hundreds of thousands of civilians lay dead. Millions more were fleeing into India, where lack of food and facilities had transformed refugee camps into