



April 2010

Dear Friends,

There is a movement sweeping across this country, among young adult Quakers and their fellow-travelers. Perhaps it has come to a school or Meeting or gathering near you recently? Perhaps you have noticed an article in an FGC or FUM or yearly meeting publication, written by someone in her or his twenties, talking about Quaker-inspired activism or ideas? Perhaps you have glimpsed the passionate energy of youth coupled with a sober message about a world in need, and some people doing something about it?

Yes, indeed, Friends, a whole new generation of Quakers is coming of age, and they mean business.

And the soundtrack of this movement? It is upbeat, it is edgy, it is smart, it is spirit-infused and it rocks the house. In a word, it is Jon Watts. (Okay, that's two words.) Yes, Jon Watts, the "Quaker rapper" who brings together a catchy sound with disciplined acoustic musicianship, clever lyricism, an earnest zeal and a keen sense of humor. Moreover, a profoundly Quaker message pervades all of that.

I have had the pleasure of participating in a Jon Watts concert – er, I mean, happening – on two occasions recently, and in both cases something surprising happened. PEOPLE DANCED. Seriously, I am talking about a group of Quakers getting funky. "What's up with that?" you may be asking. Indeed, what is up with that is that Jon Watts has tapped into a deep-seated yearning in all of us – yes, including Quakers – to feel joy and fun, even as we are acknowledging and accepting that the world could use some fixing.

Perhaps the genius of Jon's music and performance lays precisely in his fusion of these two sides of the Quaker coin: sense and sensibility. Friends, on the one hand we know that the polar ice caps are melting, we know that U.S. foreign policy does not reflect the Peace Testimony, and we know that the Religious Society of Friends has devolved into a fractious bunch of fiefdoms that can barely talk with one another. What a downer. On the other hand, sometimes we forget that the message of Friends presupposes the crazy, wonderful message that a sacred spirit is in us and amongst us, and that obedience to that spirit can produce outcomes like Peace, Simplicity, Community and Right Stewardship. And, as today's adult young Friends are reminding us, it can also produce ... beauty and joy!

Jon Watts brings people together across boundaries of age, theology and musical taste. After Jon's recent performance at George School, I heard a wide range of affirmative responses from various people. A spiritually-seeking teacher in his late twenties remarked, "Wow. Jon Watts is the real deal. He's got it." A very savvy girl of 18 said, "He is SO hot! I have all of his CDs." A colleague in her 50's noted, "I love his stuff. And my kids and their friends all have his music on their iPods."

I encourage you to become aware of the music and ministry of Jon Watts, and to invite him to your school/Meeting/college/community/gathering. He will let his Light shine, and I am guessing that he will help yours to shine, too.

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