Finding those deeper connections

By Steven Barrie-Anthony
November 07, 2005 in print edition E-3

It was 1972 and David Lynch was encountering in full measure this fickle and disappointing world. The filmmaker who would go on to direct “Blue Velvet” and “Lost Highway” was making $50 a week delivering the Wall Street Journal, with moviemaking as a sideline. He was angry much of the time and didn’t know why.

Then he heard the maxim “True happiness doesn’t lie out there somewhere. It lies within yourself.” He searched for a way to access unadulterated bliss and stumbled upon Transcendental Meditation, a practice based in an ancient Indian tradition that the Beatles and Mia Farrow made famous when they embraced it in the 1960s.

Lynch has meditated every day since, and this weekend, he was at UC Irvine, encouraging students to find strength within themselves and “experience the unity of existence.”

But among a rapt audience of nearly 1,000 on Saturday, not everyone was there to learn about meditation. One would-be screenwriter approached the microphone to say, “I just have a yes-or-no question: Can you read my script?” Later, a film student asked Lynch for advice about getting into the business.

“My advice is to stay true to yourself, to let your voice ring out,” Lynch said. “And – not to push for Transcendental Meditation – but to me, that word ‘transcendental’ is very important. Start diving within, enliven your bliss consciousness. You’ll glow. All your friends will be very happy with you. Everyone will want to sit next to you and give you money.”

When Lynch giggled, the hall exploded in laughter.

The nationwide tour has drawn huge crowds of college students; on Saturday, organizers opened up two spillover auditoriums where UCI students and others watched Lynch speak on video monitors.

Students are more than simply interested in rubbing shoulders with a famous movie director, says Manuel Gomez, the UC Irvine vice chancellor who invited Lynch to campus. “There has recently been a growing thirst among many young people for a deeper connection to their lives and to the world around them.”

The theory of the underlying unity of all things, expressed in different forms in many mystical traditions, has been criticized by some postmodern thinkers as devaluing the vast expanse of human differences; on Saturday, that debate played out before the crowd.

“I find this to be problematic,” one student said to Lynch. “The world is diverse, and I don’t find that to be a bad thing.”

“Oh, but it’s beautiful, diversity and unity,” Lynch said. “When you raise your consciousness, you experience...
diversity much more."

“It sounds like you’re selfish, like this is more and more about the individual,” countered the student.

After the event, Lynch signed autographs, and John Hagelin, a quantum physicist and proponent of TM who also spoke, chatted about science and enlightenment. A group of graduate students debriefed. They were hoping TM could help reduce their stress levels.

“We’ve got hives on our hives,” said Dan Lench, a doctoral student in civil engineering. “After watching this, I still don’t know how to do the meditation. I just hope that when I

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