



Ben DeSoto / Chronicle

Members of the band Render perform a mournful composition during the "Words for Peace" event on Sunday. It was an afternoon of poetry, music and live phone readings.

Cautions on war voiced at forum

Callers around world air views

By **JO ANN ZUÑIGA**
Houston Chronicle

A Pakistan journalist warned Sunday that a war against Iraq would only distract from rebuilding Afghanistan and worsen the situation.

Ahmed Rashid wrote a book called *Taliban* in which he warned about terrorism more than a year before the Sept. 11 attacks.

"A war with Iraq would be a major distraction and take Western attention away from reconstruction of Afghanistan," Rashid said.

The correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and Pakistan's *The Nation* newspaper spoke along with Jewish and Palestinian writers who used telephones to bring their words from around the world to a listening Houston audience.

Called "Words for Peace," the event at the DiverseWorks gallery could not have been more timely

amid the international saber rattling, organizers said.

Sehba Sarwar, director of Voices Breaking Boundaries which hosted the event, said, "We wanted people to know that despite all the surveys in the media about support for the war, it is not a valid consensus."

Irena Klepfisz, a Jewish poet and activist who escaped Nazi-occupied Poland, called in from New York urging American Jews to organize against the occupation of Palestinian lands.

She focused on her writings and knowing one's past. The author of *Different Enclosures, A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*, said, "I incorporate Yiddish in my writing. I want to keep it alive."

Ratha Kumar, an India-born Houston choreographer, danced for the crowd combining international styles of prayer, including genuflecting while making the cross over her chest, with kneeling and bowing in the Muslim style of prayer and the traditional clasp of hands.

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