

Los Angeles Times

CALENDAR

E
Arts
Entertainment
Style
Culture

Monday, April 18, 2005

calendarlive.com

WORLD MUSIC REVIEW

Stringer 'frees the heart' with Indian chanting

By DON HECKMAN
Special to The Times

Singer Dave Stringer spent his early years in the jazz world, and echoes from that experience continue to resonate through his performances of the Indian chant music known as *kirtan*. His appearance Saturday at the Golden Bridge yoga center in Hollywood, backed by a six-piece ensemble, was a fascinating display of how effectively he has integrated those elements — as well as traces of blues, gospel and rock — into his music.

The origin of *kirtan* dates to the devotional Bhakti yoga movement of 15th century India. Traditionally, a lead singer (and ensemble) presents melodic mantras and the audience responds, and that's essentially what Stringer offered to an audience seated on the wooden floor of the new yoga-performance venue.

It is an experience, according to Stringer, in which "the mantras quiet the mind and the music frees the heart."

In this particular version of that experience — the sort of interactive event with an eagerly

enthusiastic, hand-clapping crowd that Stringer regularly offers at yoga centers — it also called up an earlier era best typified by the Hare Krishna scenes in the musical "Hair."

The most fascinating aspect of Stringer's performance was the way in which he shaped the experience into a far more compelling musical encounter.

His chanting of the mantras was enhanced by his continuing rhythmic rearrangements of the phrases, often throwing them off-center, daring the crowd to follow him — they usually did — through a maze of rhythmic twists and turns.

His players, especially in the final mantras, embarked on soaring improvisational flights, layering the vocal dialogue with colorful embellishments and a few traces of welcome dissonance.

The result was a departure from ancient *kirtan*. But it also was an intriguing example of what can happen when a mind such as Stringer's finds a convincing way to apply his own creative impulses to the transformative overview of a classic musical form.