



Reviews / Mālā

“Defiantly not your traditional kirtan album.”

“Mala” Reviewed at Sea of Tranquility

<http://www.seaoftranquility.org/reviews.php?op=showcontent&id=1840>

American musician Dave Stringer fuses kirtan - an age-old practice of rhythmic call-and-response mantra chanting rooted in Middle Eastern tradition and derived from the Sanskrit word meaning “to sing” - with rock, gospel and jazz music to create a tremendously appealing sonic amalgam. Not being a practitioner of yoga, I wasn't prepared for the impact this compelling CD would have on me. The more I listened - three times in a row the first day - the more aware of my surroundings I found myself. I became more energetic, motivated and inspired. But, alas, I didn't chant, even though I wanted to chant. I guess I'm just not a chanter.

You might be, though - especially after listening to Stringer's third record, Mala. Apparently, his music is played at actual yoga studios for actual yoga participants, but it'll sound just as good in your own living room, bedroom, car or office. Indispensable liner notes not only help listeners interpret what Stringer is chanting but also how the lyrics fits into the bigger musical picture the man is trying to paint. Despite the use of spiritual lyrics and exotic traditional Indian instruments, Stringer doesn't even pretend to be Peter Gabriel. Rather, the eight rather indescribable songs on Mala take on a life of their own, beginning with the surprisingly moving opener “Govinda Jaya Jaya,” on which Stringer's dusty but likable voice converges with female and child singers in a joyful noise. Much of Mala is equally upbeat, reaching a climax on “Saraswati Ma,” a tribute to the goddess of art, music and literature that begins slowly and builds with melodies so beautiful you may want to cry. The next song, “Devakinandana (Minor),” is the perfect companion piece to “Saraswati Ma” by continuing the soaring melodies and group vocals that highlight so much of this album, and then throwing in some joyful hand claps at the end to up the feel-good factor. Stringer closes Mala with the Middle-Eastern-tinged “Universal Prayer,” whose translated lyrics are apropos in this era of international strife.

Mala is easily one of the most ear-opening records I've heard during 2004. This album will resound within your entire body as a celebration of existence. Music that has the ability to help listeners transcend their emotions and want to explore new aural possibilities - music like this - is, indeed, a gift. I think I just discovered what I'll be giving to those I love for Christmas this year.

“Mala” Reviewed at Yoga Basics

<http://www.yogabasics.com/yogabasicsnews/images/tpixel.GIF>

This is defiantly not your traditional kirtan album. Drawing heavily from gospel, jazz and rock, Stringer melds the ancient Indian mystical practice of kirtan with the soul and spirit of American music to create a very accessible, upbeat and fun approach to chanting Sanskrit mantras. Stringer has also managed to use an incredibly diverse and large number of musicians and instruments on these tracks all the while maintaining a very unified, exquisitely crafted and cohesive style. The traditional “call-and-response” format of kirtan is utilized through most of the tracks and becomes strikingly beautiful on the songs with vocal duets. The liner notes contain the words to the chants with a brief commentary of its meaning and relevance.

“Mala” Reviewed in Milwaukee Yoga Magazine

<http://www.milwaukeeyogamagazine.com/>

In a quest for peace and understanding, many people are turning to an ancient Indian practice of devotional chanting called Kirtan. Kirtan, the roots of which can be traced back thousands of years, involves the call-and-response chanting of various Sanskrit mantras. One of the most innovative and compelling musicians to arise from the yoga community worldwide in the last several years is Dave Stringer. Originally trained as a visual artist and jazz musician, Dave's sound brings together traditional Indian instruments such as the sitar and the harmonium with the more unexpected yet exuberant sounds of American gospel.

Dave's newest CD, Mala, by far reflects a greater eastern influence than his other two CD's, Japa and Brink. Produced by Saul David Raye, himself one of the leading Thai Yoga Therapy teachers in the United States and an experienced recording engineer and producer, I found Mala to be fluid, funky, sometimes profound and sometimes just plain fun.

With songs like the quietly driving Bhagavati and the bouncy Govinda Jaya Jaya, Mala contains music that can be used for both meditation and as music to listen to simply for the pleasure of it. Saraswati Ma has a delightful blend of a young female voice with Dave's more soulful voice and is one of the most meditative songs on the CD. Devakinandana has a great jazzy beginning, which then surprises as it turns into a soulful chant that has a quiet, almost pleading tone.

I once read that kirtan is a way to “sing ourselves into remembrance of who we are.” Stringer's Mala is a great CD with which to start that remembrance.



MALA
DAVE STRINGER
AJNA MUSIC

Dave Stringer is known by many yogis throughout the world as one of the premier *kirtan* singers of the genre and deserves the recognition he doesn't often receive. Stringer's been performing for chanters for years and often travels from Cuba to France to New York in the course of a few months to bring the names of God to thousands of devotional yogis. *Mala* is Stringer's latest release and certainly his most ambitious and best work to date. Incorporating the best world sacred musicianship the Los Angeles basin has to offer, Stringer seems to have gone back to his roots as a devotee of Muktananda with this effort. He refrains from using any English texts and makes excellent use of some of the Sanskrit chants that he's been performing live for years.

“Stringer seems to have gone back to his roots as a devotee of Muktananda”

The pay-off for Stringer is that he isn't trying to overproduce himself or impress anyone with his often brilliant ear for production. Instead, *Mala* is a delightful collection of popular North Indian chants produced with authentic devotion and professional execution. Each piece of music here features Stringer's excited voice dipped in boyish enthusiasm and love for the path. Girish's tablas and percussive rhythms are always a pleasure to listen to, while the response vocals by Allie Stringer and C.C. White offer flattering harmonic replies to Stringer's lead.

Mala is an important addition to anyone's collection of kirtan albums. It is by far Stringer's finest release and while we still anticipate his first attempt at a live kirtan album someday, *Mala* certainly will help his fans endure the wait.
-Michael R. Mollura

LAYOGA
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Reviews / Japa

“Gives me chills every time I hear it...”

“Japa” Reviewed at Ma’s India

<http://store.mas-india.com/davestringerjapa.html>



A celebrated figure in the yoga community known for his intoxicating chant sessions, Dave Stringer has been chanting since the early 90's and has performed all over the country. JAPA (a Sanskrit term that refers to the repetition of mantras) was recorded in a series of live studio sessions and features five elongated call-and-response style kirtans. The music is a mix of Eastern and Western instruments, including harmonium, guitar, sarod, saxophone violin, percussion and other sounds. Stringer's voice is rich and expressive, making a nice counterpoint to his backing ensemble, which includes vocalists Toni Childs, Seane Corn and Donna De Lory as well as Girish on percussion, Domic Dean Breaux on flute and many others. A fusion of different sounds and cultural elements, this divine mindtrip is one you won't want to miss.

“Japa” Reviewed at CD Baby

<http://www.cdbaby.com>

[5 out of 5 stars] I Love This CD

Reviewer: David Runk

It's over too soon but this is exactly how I've always wanted to hear Bhajans done. Westernized but very soulful. It reminds me of the chanting circles I used to attend in the hippie days and I mean that as a compliment.

[5 out of 5 stars] Fabulous Work!

Reviewer: Ragani

If you have ever heard Dave live, you're going to love this CD! Full of harmonies, fusion of western, and eastern grooves, and a powerful chorus of talented singers. Great album!

[5 out of 5 stars] Dave Stringer's Japa is AMAZING ~*~

Reviewer: Lanie Unger

I had been wanting Dave Stringer's cd Japa for quite a time, since I had seen him perform @ Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama (2002). Devakinandana Gopala has to be my favorite song on the album.... The ode to the light shining from your own spirit just gives me chills every time I hear and chant it. Anyone that is curious about chanting should definitely check out JAPA....

[5 out of 5 stars] Fantastic CD. The singing and the feeling in the music is truly wonderful. A must.

Reviewer: Jo

Heard the CD in a yoga class and just had to ask the instructor who it was. Long story short - I love it. The feeling in the music, the instruments and the singing, is truly wonderful. I highly recommend this CD to all. Fantastic!

[4 out of 5 stars] I love this CD!

Reviewer: Myla

I heard Dave and his posse live, and now I am hooked. I bought 3 CDs, and gave 2 away. The fortunate giftees and I share the same 'closer to enlightenment' experiences.

[4 out of 5 stars] Absolutely Amazing.

Reviewer: jan

I have every kirtan and bhajan cd on the market i think. i was surprised at how wonderful this one was. A sleeper marketing wise. When i listen to music i look for soul quality. not quantifiable but its either there or not. Japa definitely has that quality which makes it such a delight to listen to. japa was soooo good, I immediately ordered Stringer's other cd Brink.

[5 out of 5 stars] Stringer bridges worlds with soul-jazz-funk compositions.

Reviewer: Jeffrey Lidke

Japa is the finest chant cd on the market. Stringer has done an exceptional job of combining the live vibe of chanting with the refined sound of a studio production.

Reviews / Brink

“Stunning and otherworldly.”

“Brink” Reviewed in NAPRA Review

<http://www.napra.com/>

Stringer has already proved his mettle on the live performance circuit and is enjoying some well-deserved popularity with the spiritual and yoga crowd. With this debut album, his music is now accessible to a larger audience. Evoking real-life imagery, these pop, jazz, and Eastern-influenced original compositions are thoroughly entertaining. This incredibly varied album was inspired by Stringer's experiences during time spent in India and reflects his innermost mosaic. Some songs have lyrics in English and Sanskrit while other tracks contain emotionally charged vocalization that transcends language. Instrumentation and guest artists are just as diverse. All these elements combine to create a fresh and delightful album that should appeal to a huge section of the living, breathing, thinking, and listening audience.



“Brink” Reviewed by Lloyd Barde / Backroads

http://www.backroadsmusic.com/reviews/s_reviews.htm

An amazing supporting cast & some of the deepest vocal, chant-oriented music in a long time. There seems to be a revival of interest in vocals, and especially chant-style artists like Deva Premal, Jennifer Berezan, Rasa, Krishna Das, and Jai Uttal. "Brink" is stunning, and not surprisingly, comparable to the other-worldly music of Vas or Thomas Barquee's outstanding debut, "Temple." Greg Ellis from Vas plays percussion and serves as co-producer here, & Azam Ali adds supporting vocals along the way. Hans Christian (from Rasa) helps out, with co-producer duties plus brilliant cello and sarangi playing, as so do Suzanne Teng, Donna DeLory, John Loose, and David Zasloff. But it is Stringer's voice and compositions that stand out.

“Brink” Reviewed by Debi Winston-Buzil / Yoga Chicago Magazine

<http://www.yogachicago.com/sep00/music.shtml>

Dave Stringer's "brink" is a beautiful recording—one of my favorites this year. His voice, resonant and luxurious, moves the record. The music of brink goes well beyond traditional yogic chanting. There is a pop sensibility to his arrangements, as well as jazzy chord structure. The tracks are instrumentally lush, including Dave on harmonium, dulcimer, tampurra, accordion and guitar. Hans Christian (Rasa) adds cello to most tracks, and Greg Ellis (Vas) brings a wide array of percussive sounds. Azam Ali (Vas) adds her vocal flavor as well. Dave Stringer's music is modern and accessible, capturing a devotional flavor while reflecting an American consciousness. Modern, solarized photography adds to the artistry of the cover and liner notes. The title track "brink," which closes the CD, is a beautiful instrumental featuring Hawaiian steel guitar and trumpet. The beautiful thing about the music of Vas, Rasa, and Dave Stringer, is that these musicians, all hailing from California, support each other's music, play on each other's recordings, and create a sense of community.

“Brink” Reviewed by Ma's India

<http://www.mas-india.com/davstrinbrin.html>

A chanting force to be reckoned with, husky-voiced Dave Stringer fuses the essence of the east with the pop sensibilities of the west on this remastered rendition of his acclaimed E.P., BRINK. In addition to enhanced audio, Stringer increases the amount of cuts on the album by four, which means more hypnotic bliss, Sanskrit style. The album features a variety of supporting players including Greg Ellis and Azam Ali of Vas, Suzanne Teng and Hans Christian, each of whose exotic instrumentation provides a folk/jazz-friendly vibe with a devotional twist. Among the album's achievements is "Sleep," a song that sounds like an Asian spin on a Dave Matthews Band tune. An alternative is the beautifully acoustic "Ganashyama," one of the album's more traditional numbers.

“Brink” Reviewed by All Music Guide

Dave Stringer has integrated his interest in Kirtan, an Indian tradition of devotional chanting, with his masterful grasp of Western popular music, creating an exciting style of psychedelic pop as informed by traditional Eastern music as the Beatles

“Brink” Reviewed by Music Connection

The long-awaited release from one of L.A.'s top world music producers/composers is a refreshing blend of American-based folk-rock tunes with traditional North Indian influenced mantras. Stringer's devotional touches as a singer tend to really shine on the more spiritually rich tunes like "Shivo' Ham, Shivo' Ham" and "Ganashyama." The production is clear and sweet bringing out some impressive performances by many of the great players of today's jazz, world and new age music communities."

yoga

JOURNAL

BY DERK RICHARDSON

DAVE STRINGER: Brink. *Valley Entertainment:*
www.valley-entertainment.com; \$16

QUITE WELL KNOWN as a *kirtan* singer in the worlds of yoga and devotional music, California musician Dave Stringer makes his debut as a folk-rock singer-songwriter with 11 songs that unite his spiritual and secular interests in a surprisingly seamless blend. Following a path parallel to that of Jai Uttal, Stringer moves back and forth between original pop songs performed in English and traditional Sanskrit chants, thus gently obliterating any doubt about these two forms belonging on the same record.

Continuity is provided by ingenious arrangements that incorporate a fluid mix of Eastern and Western acoustic and electric



instruments - a combination of various guitars (including dobro and Hawaiian steel), dulcimer, piano,

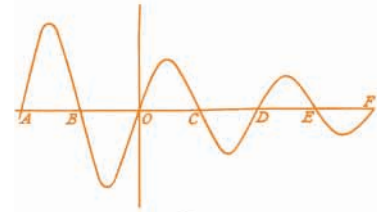
accordion, harmonium, tabla, sarangi, cello, violin, flute, trumpet, drums and a plethora of ethnic percussion and backing vocals.

An accomplished record producer as well (Axiom of Choice, Suzanne Teng), Stringer has organized the diverse sounds into a sequence of elegant aural rainbows, retaining an Eastern cultural resonance even when fleshing out unabashedly pop melodies.

MARCH/APRIL 2003

Radio Review

“A fascinating and distinctive record!”



“Brink” Reviewed by George Graham / WVIA-FM

<http://georgegraham.com/reviews/stringer.html>

This week, we have a fascinating recording that combines Western musical values with Indian influences, though less the familiar sounds of Indian classical music, but instead is based on what is called kirtan, or chant singing. It's a CD by Los Angeles-based Dave Stringer called Brink. Brink, while showing a good deal of Eastern influence is hardly an album of traditional music. The CD mixes Eastern and Western influences easily, often with traditional Indian instruments like the tamboura and tabla drums mixing with music in Western 3/4 or 6/8 time, with unexpected combinations of instruments including harmonium -- a pump organ -- cello and trumpet.

The CD has a mix of pieces with English lyrics, along with traditional chants and poems in Sanskrit, in one case dating back to the 9th Century. But despite the traditional material, the sound is contemporary, with enough domination by Western influences that it does not come across as a particularly exotic world music album.

Leading off is one of the pieces with original English lyrics, Checking the Arithmetic. The piece is quite interesting lyrically, while the musical setting spans influences ranging from folk singer-songwriters to the Eastern sound with the tabla drums and tamboura.

Very much in the traditional Eastern sound is Shivo'ham Shivo'ham, with lyrics from around 800 AD. The refrain translates from the Sanskrit "I am consciousness and bliss." After the meditative beginning, the piece gains momentum, in the tradition of the kirtan singing, though the added elements bring a more Western sound to the piece.

One of the most eclectic pieces on an already wide-ranging album is The Homing Instinct, with memorable lyrics about the impulse to return home among the creatures on the earth, including people. The track features a fascinating mix of instrumentation combining Eastern and Western sounds.

Ganashyāma is perhaps the most meditative piece on the album. It is a masterful combination of sonic beauty with subtle textures that add lots of interest. The 16th Century Sanskrit lyrics are about being lost in love.

My favorite piece on the CD is The Satellite Sky, which is one of the more Western-sounding songs on the album. It's a very attractive piece, on which the Eastern influence is more subtle, taking the form of percussion and the general atmospheric texture, while harmonically, Stringer's jazz background becomes evident.

Dave Stringer's Brink is a fascinating and distinctive record in the way it mixes Indian and Western sounds. That concept was something of a cliché in the 1960s psychedelic era, mixing sitars and tablas with electric guitars, but in the current period of interest in World Music, there have not been that many Indian fusion efforts, and Stringer's emphasizes a rather different facet of Indian music, the kirtan singing tradition, together with the meditative aspect. While the CD can approach new age at times, a distinguishing feature is that the Western music side contains a lot of interesting and artistically substantial ingredients, while the instrumentation is a wonderful eclectic blend with skillful arrangements and first-rate musicianship. This is music that one can not only use for meditation, but also makes edifying foreground listening.

Our grade for sound quality is rather close to an "A." The music is well recorded, and mix engineers Hans Christian and Thomas Barquee resisted the temptation to get overly spacey with the reverb effects, avoiding the hackneyed overly atmospheric sound of much new age music. The dynamic range, the scope from loudness from softest to strongest, is also better than average.

There are those purists for whom anything less than strict authenticity in styles is reason to dismiss a work as unworthy. Brink does not pretend to be authentic, and drawing as it does on both intelligent composition in the Western tradition, and the ambience of the Eastern sounds, the result is a fine album that rewards listening on a number of levels.