Chants of a Lifetime

Musician and sound healer Sophia cements her role as one of today’s most vibrant singers with SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS

Sophia has been making exquisite music dedicated toward peace and healing for over 40 years. Her sweet, pure voice is a natural fit for the illuminating material she sings, and the soft, multi-cultural rhythms she employs add a very appealing earthy sensibility to her music. She recently spoke with Music Design about her exciting new album SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS, and reflected on the breadth of her career.

MD: Tell us what got you interested in music.
SO: I began to sing very early — my father loved opera and I seem to remember singing along with “Carmen” from my crib. I got my first guitar at 15 and played in coffee houses — Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Judy Collins were my heroes and I saw music as a way to have an impact on the world.

Frankly, my spiritual path began in the ’60s and I began to write spiritual and “save the world” songs. I began to record my vocal tracks, I found that I was deeply impressed with the power of the voice, both sung and spoken, to move people, and I’ve dedicated my work to creating that kind of moving and uplifting sound.

MD: When did you start on your spiritual path and begin chanting?
SO: Frankly, my spiritual path began in the ’60s when I spent two years in the Haight Ashbury. I was part of a commune, the One World Family, and began to write spiritual and “save the world” songs to perform with our band “The Angels Own Blessed Grace Deliverance from the Demons of Dualism Double Band and Chorus,” which toured the West Coast in a big school bus painted with images and words of wisdom. Through that experience, I saw that we were indeed all ‘One’ — and that revelation has informed all of my work since. The chanting was a way to induce that feeling of connection, with everyone joining in. I’ve always thought of the simple, beautiful, spiritual and repetitive chanting as “jingles for the soul”!

MD: What feelings are evoked when you chant?
SO: The material for SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS was drawn from as far back as my first cassette recording, which was released in 1978, so my message has been basically the same. What I have done over these decades is pay attention to the responses of my audience to my music, and provided the spiritual/sensual/tantric material along with the songs that bring us closer together with each other and to our precious Mother Earth.

That all being said, I will reveal to you that, as I was beginning to record my vocal tracks, I found that I had developed some kind of a spiritual voice — the voice of the Heart of the Mother — and that I began to use it to meditate and do movement with, some every morning, CHAKRA HEALING CHANTS incorporating sound, sound healing and the use of potent seed sounds, especially the Hebrew Sephirot — the aspects of the Divine from the Kaballah. The concept for the album was derived from the work of Carolyn Myss and her great book, “Anatomy of the Spirit,” in which she draws a correlation between the Chakra system, the Seven Sacraments of the Church, and the levels of the Tree of Life.

MD: What chant traditions do you draw from on the new album?
SO: The Wisdom Tradition, which in this case would include chants in English, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Latin and a bit of Spanish (courtesy of Fantuzzi).

MD: Musically, how does this album compare to CHAKRA HEALING CHANTS?
SO: I am hoping that this new CD will be more accessible to people in general. The songs on SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS tend to be longer, and more sensual, particularly the first couple. I think the general feeling of the music is more contemporary, partly because of the keyboards of my engineer/co-producer Donny, and also the additional percussion programming by a very talented younger guy — Bobby Cochrane, Sequoia Records’ in-house engineer and mastering engineer of the group Hands Upon the Black Earth (who are featured on many of the “Buddha Lounge” releases). Our flute and sax player, Johnny Zangrando is a genius, whose sensitivity and major chops thrill me.

David Gordon came on board in a big way toward the end of the project, when his guidance, technical expertise and advice and musical intuition brought it all into focus. His genius at mastering gave our music the finesse and polish Sequoia Records is known for.

MD: In what ways does SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS show your growth as an artist?
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MD: With this album were there any specific musical sounds you wanted to incorporate?
SO: I love the great rhythms and bass tracks that so smoothly and sensually support the exquisite keyboard arrangements and masterful soloists. We worked this time with many singers, including a spectacular 50 voice choir (thank you Daniel Hughes and the San Jose Choral Project!) I was actually in tears myself when I heard the final mix of that song. Donny brought into the studio the best musicians available for our kind of project on Maui, since he has worked with just about everyone there over many years.

MD: What is your role as one of today’s most vibrant singers with SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS?
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MD: What feelings are evoked when you chant?
SO: When I chant, I feel that these chants help bring us into altered states of consciousness. I’m drawn to material from many different traditions and spiritual paths. Certain chants have specific intentions connected with them: Lakshmi draws love, beauty and abundance; Ganesh clears obstacles from our path; Nam Yoho Rengey Kyo helps find parking spaces — really...

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