

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.



Sophia and Donny

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. That was greatly enhanced when I joined the first Civil Rights March on Washington in 1962, where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech. 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: That same feeling of connectedness, as well as a certain hypnotic, or right-brain experiences. I do 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; Ganesha clears obstacles from our path; Nam Yoho Rengye Kyo helps find parking spaces — really....

rated many elements of sacred sound, sound healing and the use of potent seed sounds, especially the Hebrew Sephiroth — 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.



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writers, all of whom have joined me on the recording, so the project has been a wonderful reunion for me. My working title for this collection was “Wisdom” because it contains the truth that I want to convey to the world. There is a continuity in theme, between “Blessed Am I — I am the infinite within my soul,” the first song, and “I am One with the Heart of the Mother,” the final piece. There is also a strong emphasis on the Divine Feminine, which I have developed throughout my recording career.

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: CHAKRA HEALING CHANTS developed a strong following — what are your feelings on the success of that album and the fact that it resonated with so many people?

SO: I’m thrilled about that! The feedback I have received indicates that people like to use it to meditate or do movement with, some every morning. CHAKRA HEALING CHANTS incorpo-

MD: What themes did you set out to explore with SPIRIT HEALING CHANTS?

SO: This album includes many of my very favorite songs, some by my very favorite singer/song-

MD: What chant traditions do you draw from in 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 mastermind 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



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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?

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 nodes on my vocal cords. I was referred to a fantastic teacher on Maui, Joy Fields, who was able to not only to help me heal that scary condition, but open a whole area of my range that I never have had access to. I believe my voice now is better than ever.

MD: In what ways do you feel that your music could be beneficial to listeners?

SO: Listen when you make love, when you meditate. Listen with your heart and sing along. Over the years, I have heard from people who listened to help them through their divorce, through their birthing labors, through the passing of loved ones, through debilitating diseases. They’ve played my music for weddings and funerals. They’ve played it to help them sleep and to help them wake up! ☺