

CD Reviews: *Ancient Spirit* (Kirtan Cafe, Vol. II)

Music Design (August 2006)

Reviewed by Dan Cowen

"Ragani, who has grown to become one of the nation's leading kirtan chanters, proves her worth with this exquisite collection of mantras. Set to a soundtrack of light rhythm, flute, harmonium and guitar, the recording provides a wonderful atmosphere for spiritual journeys and growth. Besides the smooth waves of chant brought forth by the gentle voiced Ragani, the release features the tabla playing of Girish, as well as an invigorating cocktail of rhythm that includes flute, harmonium and guitar."

Conscious Choice (October 2006)

Whole Life Times (October 2006)

Common Ground (October 2006)

Reviewed by Nick Dedina

"Many yoga practitioners have come across Ragani's name over the years. A lifelong devotee of meditation, yoga and acupuncture, Ragani has been widely featured in the book *Yoga, Mastering the Basics* and its accompanying video series. Here, Ragani crafts an album of kirtan, or ancient chants and mantras that are still used in yoga (most often in the Sanskrit language). On one level, the tracks on *Ancient Spirit*, especially "Jaya Ganesh," work as chanting music. But those who have no interest in communal chanting may be surprised at how accessible and soothing the music on *Ancient Spirit* is. Ragani's bright harmonic sense has a Western feel and further softens the melodies, drawing new elements out of the music. The opening number, "Prayer of Harmony," brings to mind a winning collaboration between Enya and the sadly departed George Harrison. There is genuine warmth that carries through the entire release, and on "Hare Krishna Govinda," Ragani sounds as if she's singing a lullaby to a child. As on the rest of *Ancient Spirit*, the surprisingly sophisticated backings ebb and flow in a comforting, rocking manner; at the same time they slowly build in power and emotion. Ragani balances the deceptive simplicity of ancient folk music with the scope of a cosmic orchestra."

OnMilwaukee.com (October 2006)

Reviewed by Molly Snyder Edler

"Anyone who has attended a kirtan in Milwaukee is already aware of Ragani's talents. On the first Friday of each month, her rich voice and all-encompassing personality attract hundreds of people to the basement of the North Shore Presbyterian Church, 4048 N. Bartlett Ave. Now, she enlightens and charms fans with her recently released second CD, "Ancient Spirit, Kirtan Café Vol. II." The collection features six yoga chants or kirtan songs -- a style of chanting that originated in East India and is one of the world's oldest forms of spiritual music. "Ancient Spirit" features six chants, ranging from four minutes to almost 18 minutes. The tracks start out quiet, slowly rise to a crescendo and eventually return to the opening calmness. Throughout the "journey," most listeners feel uplifted and refreshed, thanks to the joyful rhythms and Ragani's incredibly soothing yet powerful voice. Ragani plays harmonium, keyboards and percussion, enriching the already mesmerizing sound. A host of other musicians add a mix of traditional instruments like tabla and sitar as well as typical western instruments including flute, guitar and electric bass. The combination of old and new instruments serves as a metaphor for Ragani's music in general: a fantastic blend of the ancient and contemporary, able to soothe and inspire at the same time. Worth noting is the fact kirtan is reclaiming "Krishna culture" from the mainstream's misperception that chanting is practiced solely by robed hippies in airports. In the kirtan setting, Krishna mantras are practiced by people from all religions -- as well as atheists and agnostics -- as a way to relax, or, for some people, to connect with a higher consciousness. Ragani's first record, "Best of Both Worlds," was released in May 2003. Since then, she has achieved tremendous success in the world of kirtan and is regarded today as one of the nation's leading kirtan chanters. Born Julie Ann Hobing, Ragani was raised in an Indiana household that valued spirituality, yoga, meditation, homeopathy and vegetarian eating during the late '70s when such a lifestyle was not understood by mainstream America. Ragani met Swami Rama at the age of eight. For two decades, he took her under his wing and Ragani spent many summers at his ashram in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Although he passed away in 1996, Ragani continues to draw from his love and inspiration. Hence, "Ancient Spirit" is a tribute to Rama."

YogaChicago (Jan/Feb 2007)

Reviewed by Debi Winston Buzil

"The Maharani of Milwaukee's chant scene has done it again! Ragani's sophomore release, *Ancient Spirit/Turn the World to Love*, is a rollicking East-West take on India's ancient mantras. The kirtan scene's beloved Girish, along with Milwaukee's Tim Maher, adds tabla and world beats. With lovely vocals and melodies, this is traditional kirtan with a delicious twist. Ragani offers all her efforts to her guru, Swami Rama. The devotion and love show up strongly. Check out Ragani's live kirtan the first Friday of the month in Milwaukee. It's well worth the trip to experience the bliss with a sea of a hundred chanters. For more information, visit raganiworld.com."

Light of Consciousness (Spring 2007)

"Ragani's beautiful kirtan is a gentle immersion into the devotional path of awakening the Divine Name through chanting. Opening with the Sanskrit invocation, *Om Saha Navavatu*, a prayer of universal harmony, she continues with *Jaya Ganesha Jaya Jaya Gananatha*, a chant to the elephant-headed Deity, who removes difficulties and impurities and clears our path to Liberation. Each chant is sung in traditional call and response style with a sea of chanters. Three chants to Sri Krishna describe the incarnation of Vishnu as the cowherd boy, enchanter of souls. *Durga Durga* is sung in praise to the aspect of Divine Mother, the power of God within us, who destroys our

ignorance. Ranging in mood from contemplative to rhythmic and energizing, these kirtan chants evoke joy and the sublime love of God."

Odyssey (Feb/Mar 2007)

Reviewed by Silke Erasmus

"Early one morning I was presented the option of reviewing several CDs. When looking at and feeling all the CDs I chose to start with Ragani and am immensely grateful I did. What a wonderful way to start the day. Ragani is a Sanskrit name for a stunning lady teaching and leading singers (all of us really) in the art of Kirtan... All that I can really say is that this is to be experienced and the feelings within me can hardly be put into words, lest I sound silly. Regardless of the religious or philosophical nuance, this CD touches the heart and inevitably provokes a reverential response in the body. I am deeply inspired by the intoxicating melodies, and the love is infectious. Whether you practice yoga or not, this is absolutely beautiful and I love it."