

CD Reviews: *Best of Both Worlds* (Kirtan Cafe, Vol. 1)

Music Design (May/June 2003)

Reviewed by Dan Cowen

"There's no mistaking it, chanter Ragani and her backing crew definitely have spirit. There's pure joy being poured into the call-and-response style kirtans presented on BEST OF BOTH WORLDS; it's very obvious that this album was a labor of love for all those involved. Imagine it - the music swells, the speed of the instrumentation increases and the whole sonic scene becomes a whirl of ecstatic bliss and prayerful chant. It's an infectious atmosphere, you can't help but want to move with the music. This dynamic kirtan session is a tribute to yoga master Sri Swami Rama, her teacher and friend. Proceeds from the album's sale will support the charitable hospital in Northern India and other non-profit organizations established by Swami Rama."

YOGAChicago (July/Aug 2003)

Reviewed by Debi Winston-Buzil

"Ragani is a very wise woman indeed, her voice drawn from deep within her being. Best of Both Worlds is a warm and inviting embrace into kirtan. A short invocation begins the set, followed by five chants, each longer than 12 minutes. This CD follows a typical live set with Ragani: the form is introduced, the response audience joins in and the chant spirals upward in speed. Interesting Mideast percussion augment some tabla playing and nice rolling bass lines played by Michael Kashou. Girish Gambhira (Krishna Das, Dave Stringer, and Rasa, among others), a most versatile and accomplished percussionist and yogi, also adds his flavor to the CD.

"Ragani shows a deep respect for her musicians, as well as for the crowd at Milwaukee's monthly East Side Kirtan. The project is a love offering to her guru, Swami Rama. All proceeds from this CD will support the charitable hospital in Northern India and nonprofit organizations established by Swami Rama.

"Ragani is the Maharani of the Milwaukee kirtan scene. She has single-handedly created a first Friday chanting event that draws over a hundred people to come out and sing. Her philosophy is simple: Kirtan is for everyone!-including the Harley Davidson bikers based in Milwaukee. She coined the phrase "Kirtan rocks!" And yes, Ragani, it does, with your love, your sweet voice and wonderful band."

Shepherd Express (June 2004)

Reviewed by Graham Fons

"Ragani's debut transcends the categorization of New Age music. The album features an East Indian practice called Kirtan, a devotional yogic chant native to the culture for centuries, but recently adopted by Westerners. The modified form maintains its roots, involving the repetition of ancient Sanskrit mantras through melodic, call-and-response passages, but contributes a Western spin with instruments such as guitar and bass.

"Traditionalists question the craze because of its adaptation of sacred Hindu practice (imagine a group of modish Americans joined in choral chant, invoking Hindu gods of which most in the room have no understanding). It's the kind of debate once spurred by the Dalai Lama's fall into Americanization through *The Art of Happiness*, a book that revealed Buddhist philosophy to many, but was refracted through the lens of a Western psychologist. In any case, many Americans are inspired by the physical and mental impacts of Kirtan, a meditation that creates unity, aiming to open the heart and quiet the mind.

"Milwaukee is home to a thriving Kirtan scene with Ragani leading the way. Much like a live Kirtan, the album features call and response chants lead by Ragani's soothing voice, which proves the musical equivalent of unconditional intention. The album explores ethnic melodies by using just about every world instrument imaginable, creating, besides meditation enlightenment, and enjoyable musical experience with a sitar hum and finger cymbal clink. Among others, featured artists include bassist Michael Kashou, guitarist Terry Vittone, flautist Holly Haebig, and Tim Maher and Girish Gambhira on a variety of percussion. Proceeds benefit nonprofits founded by Swami Rama and a charitable hospital in the Himalayas."

LAYoga Magazine (March/April 2004)

Reviewed by Debi Winston Buzil

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