



# 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

**D**ave 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

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