

VERITAS VAMPIRUS

***LEFT* OF THE "LEFT"**

News from the Undead

The *Rude*-imentary Truth

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DEVA PREMAL & MITEN WITH MANOSE - *Cosmic Connections Live* (White Swan Records)

Having dug Indian musics for quite some time now, particularly the Carnatic mode, and having seen the Hyderabad Brothers, the unbelievable U. Srinivas - a gent who was the Tommy Emmanuel / Jimi Hendrix / Joe Satriani of his modality - and others in concert, I come to the table with deep affinities for the modus and, when necessary, a rather nasty retort for those who pervert it via hackneyed efforts, such as some of the extremely disappointing efforts Caroline and L. Shankar issued years ago, having previously shown far more aptitude than those kwik-buck releases evinced. After all, when one has modernist marvels to dwell upon, such as John McLaughlin's Shakti, or non-Indian trad revivalists like Jon B. Higgins, one needn't waste one's time on mediocrity where'er it may crop up. Thus, when I come upon a CD of Indian-based music by Westerners or Western / Eastern combinations, I approach with extreme caution, ready to flee upon the first bars and measures. That was the before-listening case with Deva Premal, Miten, and Manose and their *Cosmic Connections Live*, whom I'm now ashamed to say I never was aware of before this disc...

...and then the music started.

I hadn't in the least expected this extremely sensitive, languorous, free-flowing line of exploration, a venture marrying mellifluous Carnatic strains with melisma, liturgical repetition, spacey atmospherics, and progressive airs, kinda like a meeting of Enya, October Project, Oregon, lightsiding Gong, and others within a trans-Atlanticized Karnataka (India) by way of Woodstock (New York) or Berkeley (California). In fact, when "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo Mantra" floated up as the third cut, I was brought back to the 70s and an LP by an obscure group going by the moniker of Ozo with it's "Om Mani Padme Hum" track, a proggy, New-Agey, disco-ey (!!!) song I still love to listen to, all these many years later (I bought two copies of the vinyl to make sure I had a second if I wore the first one out; hasn't happened yet, but it probably will).

Of the disc's three titular personnel, Deva Premal is the enchanting lead singer / front-woman of the affair, with a voice forever soothing, inclusive, healing, instructive, and transcendently elemental. She also plays the always welcome drone tanpura and some keyboards as Miten tackles backing vocals, sometimes lead vocals, and guitar, Manose flanking on bansuri and second backing vocals. Joby Baker's mellow but gravituous bass work is extremely important, almost mysteriously so, and Spencer Cozens' keyboards keep the spacious perimeters wide and pastoral, the chief instrument cohering the group's omnibus individual efforts, gathering everyone into a river that has its fluctuations and waves, sinuous and undulant, but always within a single unified stream.

Premal and Miten's work (Miten's the chief composer) has been favored by Cher, the Russian Prima Ballerina Diana Vishneva, Edward James Olmos, and many many others, perhaps most especially the Dalai Lama, for whom they performed in 2002 at a conference attended by His Holiness, top world scientists, and highly respected members of the Buddhist community. The center of everything occurring

in this collection of nine songs is always twofold: 1) the transmission of bliss 2) through chanting, and the entirety of the hour-long refuge of sonorities is 100% immaculate, not a note or beat out of place, not a sentiment but is warm, friendly, intelligent, and welcoming, free of ego and self-centeredness. Then there's the pervasive presence of The All, where art and the universe meet, shake hands, and smile, revealing that there is no separation.

Cosmic Connections Live is one of the most perfect nighttime albums I've ever heard, dreamy and sidereal while perpetually well grounded, a confabulation which beckons the listener to sigh, smile, relax, drift off, dream, and be free of Earthly concerns, of the travails of bodily existence and metropolitan madness, to glimpse the true estate of life rarely even so much as pondered on this planet, let alone lived. My favorite cut is the long bonus track, the studio "Om Mantra (The Cosmic Yes)", the most ethereal of the CD, a composition that completely envelopes the listener and one you'll wish carried on for hours. Regardless, though, Dewa Premal and Miten - who have 18 best-selling CDs out (their first one still sells consistently, and last year's *Songs for the Sangha* debuted on various charts at #1) - have created a gently riveting style that's neither new nor old, and I'm not so sure that it isn't a singularity unto itself.