

Acoustic Ocean

Divine Grace

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It is no small irony to me that despite the untimely passing of one of the beloved members of **Acoustic Ocean**, namely harpist Peggy Morgan in 2016, her memory and music lives on in this new release by the band eponymously called **Divine Grace**. The music incorporates all sorts of magic. Earth magic. Hawaiian magic. Spiritual magic, additional kinds as well. I tried to do other things while listening to the music, but the complexities, the flow, and the dynamics demanded my attention. So I settled back and enjoyed all of the tracks of these island ambience as if I were on holiday. The album was accomplished by composer and guitarist Bette Phelan, cellist by Kay Aldrich, and Celtic harpist by Peggy Morgan on various tracks of New Age, contemporary, and post classical music on more than a dozen songs.

Singing Bowl and ocean waves introduce the first song **Blue Again Like Morning**. A polished six-string lead pulls the melody along in a contemporary ballad of promise. Of hope. If only our hearts and spirits could realize that each new day is a new beginning. I reviewed this album just weeks after the Maui Wildfire Tragedy and it brought a modicum of peace to me. I hope it does the same for others.

**The Vision** is the best track on Divine Grace. Somewhere between a lucid dream and a nightmare the music is incredibly ambitious and becomes an exhilaratingly audio experience. This is an emotionally driven piece with a lot of movement and includes some periods of somber darkness. Phelan's poignant guitar displays an all-encompassing spirit and soars on this dramatic acoustic work. I literally nailed the replay button down for this one.

**A Light in the Darkness** begins with a morose cello verses a mellow, music box harp in a tune of introverted examination. The cello provides the flow in the theme, but the harp is a busy, fluttering explorer, checking all the nooks and crannies that are there to be had. There are glints of light in the music, drawing us to a new and promising place.

As a former resident of the Island of Hawaii this track, **Following the King's Trail**, brought back some wonderful memories of discovery. Any visitor can be one with Hawaiian history when you visit the King's Trail. Start at Kailua Kona and walk along until you find the sandy path and the rough black lava trail that leads all the way to the petroglyphs. Please don't touch, but instead let your eyes and your spirit delve deep into the history of the Big Island that is carved into the lava. The medium tempo slack key guitar, cello, and seraphic voices are a wonderful companion to this trip back into time.

Aldrich's cello takes the lead for the intro of **Where Earth Meets Heaven** which also features Morgan's harp. They harmonize in a tune that is a homage to a place that is so special, you can

instantly feel the magic when you get there. Tiny as they are in the vast Pacific Ocean, the Hawaiian Islands have always been a place of supernatural beauty for me and countless others. There is an innate sadness inside *Where Earth Meets Heaven*, either by happenstance or miracle, but the tune is just perfect for spectators of starry, starry nights as well as sunny island daydreamers.

**Divine Grace**, the title tune is a soft, sentimental ballad and that is as it should be. Grace is a gift we must earn. Directly or indirectly, it doesn't matter. It is way up there with forgiveness and love. The prominent voice of Phelan's guitar is reverent, gentle, and above all else, kind; perhaps reflecting on the goodness that can be offered to anyone, anywhere. This is a beautiful tune.

With more than a dozen instruments and three key players, *Divine Grace* is an ambient accomplishment that you should not miss. I have heard a lot of artists from the islands, but Acoustic Ocean has always had the wherewithal to deftly and respectfully blend all of the different spirits and sentiments found in Hawaii. Their reverence to history, culture, and spirituality are always present in their music and it is a unique gift for not only the listeners, but also the composers. Very Well Done. - R J Lannan, [ArtisanMusicReviews.com](http://ArtisanMusicReviews.com)