

## Song Divine

### The Bhagavad Gita Rock Opera

Lissa Coffey and David Vito Gregoli

The late 60s, early 70s brought about the musical form known as a rock opera to the listening world. S.F. Sorrow by the Pretty Things (1968) started it off, but Tommy by the Who (1969) and The Wall by Pink Floyd (1979) are pretty much thought of as the definitive works of the genre. Until now. To add to the category we have a new work five thousand years in the making. Writer and producer **Lissa Coffey** and composer and über musician **David Vito Gregoli** re-imagine a story as old as man and define it with modern music with old world touches. **Song Divine** is eighteen tracks of chapters from the sacred Bhagavad Gita set to music that everyone can enjoy, but more importantly, they can understand.

As in most rock operas and related musicals, the story is a journey, a search for something the heart or spirit needs to become whole. Lissa Coffey's modernized, unfettered lyrics of a very complicated story allows many to appreciate the sacred scriptures of the Bhagavad Gita or Songs of God. The book depicts the preparation of a great battle between Krishna (as a manifestation of Vishnu) and Arjuna against his cousin of the Kauravas. It represents the dual-ism of mind and body, a balance sought since the dawn of thinking man. "Vito" Gregoli's music seems to achieve its own balance of old world gitas and contemporary modals by converting all of the tracks into very palatable rock/pop sensibilities. You might find yourself singing along in no time. I did. In the interest of brevity, I reviewed six notable tracks.

3000 B.C. It is the morning of the battle. Arjuna is nervous. Is all prepared? Is he prepared? The sitar waves sinuously through the music representing a river a doubt. Arjuna consults Krishna. The irony of it all is that they fight Krishna's own army. Such is the revelation of the first track, **Intro/Life's Lament**. The dulcet flute fills the senses.

*"Should I draw my sword, and kill or die?  
Or is the cost of battle much too high?"*

**Spark from Me**, one of my immediate favorites, opens with fervent piercing flute by **Sheela Bringi** and the duo of **Ramapriyan** and **Perez** as they offer a clue to the path of triumph. You will be singing this one after you hear it. It draws you in with not only its simplicity, but also its positivity.

"Of secrets I am silence, Of wisdom I am of the wise."

The track **Meditation** is anything but meditative. Although the lead in is soft, the song is a rock ballad through and through. The voice of **Deepak Ramapriyan** as Krishna sings as a guide. Look for answers in the deepest chasms of your own heart. Light orchestration adds a notable foundation for this passionate refrain.

**The Tree** is an anchoring anthem for this opera. It is presented like a popular Broadway musical selection with snappy percussion, a real chorus, and great lyrics driving the theme. Asvattha is

the Sacred Fig Tree whose branches are actually below ground representing the physical domain and the roots rising to the heavens signifying the spiritual world above. This song is the “Age of Aquarius” to the rock opera. Memorable, rousing, and invigorating as an anthem. **Arise, Arjuna** has the same stirring qualities.

Many of the tunes on Songs Divine sound like simple ballads, while others remind me of Contemporary Christian songs of worship. It makes sense. Then comes a song like **Brahman**. I would never have expected a rap kind of song in an opera devoted to Eastern teachings, but we live in interesting times. The song was entirely palatable as the refrain was sung to emphasize the power of the Brahman, the universal truth to our existence. Heavy percussion, dazzling flute, and a significant bass track. *“Brahman is imperishable. Brahman is Supreme.”*

**Liberation** opens with traditional sitar and sparkling bells, and then blooms into a question by Arjuna to Krishna. There will always be questions. Renounce the physical is the answer to the unanswerable. Krishna offer assurance to Arjuna. A way of saying have faith.

There is a Bonus Track included with Songs Divine. Yes, 19 tracks total. The throaty voice of Sadhu is **Visvambhar Seth**, the sweet replying vocal by **Venu Bhanot**. The simple tune or mantra echoes with the depth of conviction, beautifully rendered.

I would be remiss in my duty if I did mention the amazing artwork by **Rajesh Nagulakonda** that is featured in the accompanying booklet for the album. The line drawings are beautifully complex and highly stylistic. There is an endless amount of musicians and vocalists that added their talents to this monumental work. Visvambhar Seth, Alexander Perez, Deepak Ramapriyan, and Kimberly Haynes shine as vocalists. Ajay Prasana, Neelamjit Dhillon, Seela Bringi, and David Gregoli (on many instruments) bring the words to vivid life. The entire work should be on a stage near you. The combination of clear, concise, thoughtful lyrics and passionate, highly listenable themes are perfect for a major production not unlike the musicals Hair or Jesus Christ Superstar. You don't need a degree in Eastern Philosophy to enjoy this musically significant and revealing body of sacred work. Just an open heart and a taste for good music. The story will reveal itself. Highly recommended. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews