

BY DERK RICHARDSON

MANISH VYAS: Sattva—The Essence of Being. White Swan Records; 1704 14th St., Ste. 143, Boulder, CO; www.whiteswanmusic.com; (303) 527-0770.

ON THIS DEBUT CD, Indian vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Manish Vyas reveals a mature, fully realized approach to the challenges of sustaining spiritual and musical integrity while fusing traditional and modern sensibilities. Vyas and his many collaborators (including Prem Joshua and producer Raj Rishi) judiciously apply electronica effects and synthesizer atmospherics to sutras, mantras, and original chants, yielding gorgeously embellished melodies and gently loping rhythms that soothe frayed nerves and elevate the spirit.

Having studied classical tabla with the late master Ustad Alla Rakha, Vyas moved on to the hundred-string hammered dulcimer-like *santoor* and, eventually, harmonium, piano, and electric keyboard. He brings all those instruments to bear in seven pieces lushly textured with bamboo flute, strings, sitar, bass, drums, percussion, and male and female vocals. The performances range from intricately arranged renditions of sutras and chants to Vyas's breathtakingly simple vocal-and-keyboard improvisation "Karuna." Suitable for accompanying all kinds of contemplative practices, *Sattva* is pleasing as pure listening.

As more artists begin to create music faithfully based on ancient sacred texts and musical traditions while incorporating contemporary instrumental and technological innovations, a new genre is emerging—call it "devotional pop." And if it endures, we may come to regard Manish Vyas as one of its most convincing avatars.



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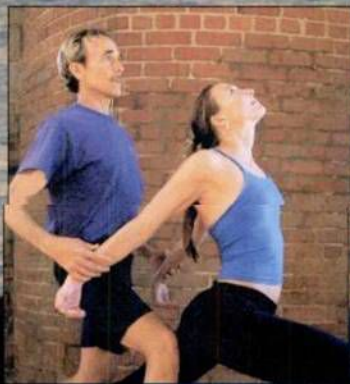
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