

Americana Highways

2.November 2021 by John Apice

Mala Oreen – *Awake*

Roots-Americana music of pristine quality pours from *Awake* – a CD of 10 shining examples of how the music transcends cultures, heritages & geography. **Mala Oreen** is a Swiss-American who has sewn together a collection of music that's exhilarating. Ethereal in its beauty. The singer-songwriter makes her home in Lucerne (Switzerland) & she shapes each song soothingly, then allows them to blossom into a whole earth catalog with full-bodied continuity. She approaches the music differently than most folk singers. She is one with the flirtation of lyrics & melody.

"Offspring," is a delicious tune with tender mandolin & steady drums. As delicate as Mala sings she displays authority with clarity throughout. "You show me the world through an infant's eye..." Very Joni Mitchell in her most poetic years. But it's Mala's marvelous vocals that carry the meaning. Not in a cruising manner, not in a soaring one, but drifting, drifting, drifting in dulcet tones. It's what music should do – it enters & soothes the inner person.

Deep cello notes & guitar picking dominate the concise "Soldier On." Ms. Oreen also has a lucid intonation, & good phrasing. She knows what words need emphasis. The coda with the female vocalists' support is angelic & has lift. "Mosaic," has these qualities also. Emotional much in the way as early Sarah McLachlan. An excellent music presentation.

Awake (Drops Nov 5–Tourbo Music) features Mala (violin/guitar), Garrison Starr (harmony vocals), Kris Donegan (guitars/electric bass), Dean Marold (upright bass/electric bass), Fats Kaplin (pedal steel/fiddle/dobro), Joshua Britt (mandolin), Chelsea McGough (cello) & producer by **Neilson Hubbard** (drums/piano/percussion/elephant foot) in Nashville, TN.

The LP's loaded & ingeniously pieced together. But while the musicians are all exceptional the spotlight is the lovely way Mala sings her stories. No cliches, clever memorable lines, & applied liberally to simplistic artistic perfection.

Maybe the only problem – the songs are too mature for younger listeners. I swim in these tunes having played them more than once already. Going back — as I would to a well-written novel because perhaps I missed something the first time. And I did.

The themes Mala explores & the tradition she manages to deftly journey through are all done with expertise. More importantly with diversity, versatility & creativity that's expressive. One listen to the title cut "Awake," & her vocals soar with impressive vibrancy.

The only female singer I recall that exemplifies this is Susan Osborn (Paul Winter's "Common Ground" LP) with her lovely "Lay Down Your Burden."

Ms. Mala Oreen has produced an exceptional piece of work. One of the year's best. A magical voice.

<https://americanahighways.org/2021/11/02/review-mala-oreen-awake/>