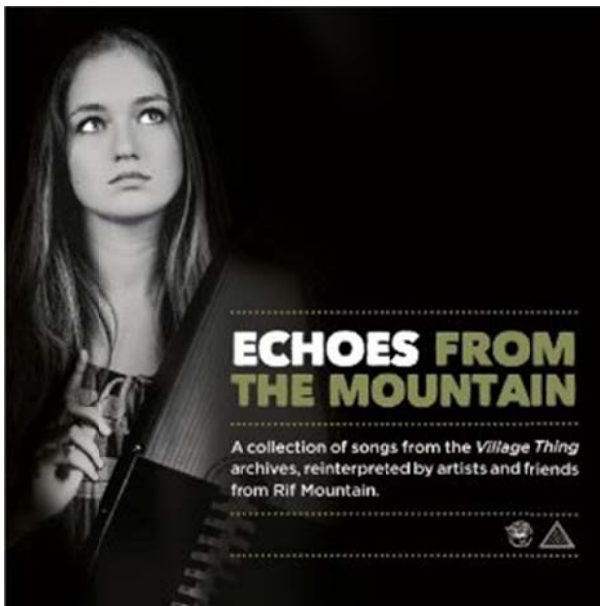


## ECHOES FROM THE MOUNTAIN - Various Artists (Rif Mountain RM-008)



Very few tribute albums measure up to their subject in every respect, but *Echoes From The Mountain* is one such, without a doubt.

Stemming from a true "lightbulb moment" of inspiration, and giving rise to many such performances, the disc is intended to pay homage to the recent exceptional Weekend Beatnik compilation *Ghosts From The Basement*, which collected choice nuggets from the Village Thing label from the 70s, the kick-start of alt/nu/psych-folk; and in doing so it neatly and proudly

encapsulates the very soul and spirit of that pioneering indie label.

Not only that, but there's also *Echoes* quite literally in the presence of two of the artists who appeared on the original Village Thing LPs all those years ago and who are still going strong: Steve Tilston and Wizz Jones. They pay tribute to each other by covering one of the other's songs (Wizz takes on Steve's celebrated *Sometimes In This Life*, Steve tackles Wizz's *Night Ferry*), and the echoes then continue into the present-day with contemporary nu-folkers sympathetically covering other reflective songs by those same writers (Pamela Wyn Shannon does Steve's *Simplicity*, The A. Lords with Mark Fry take on Steve's *It's Not My Place To Fall*, Stephen Cracknell gives us a mbira-bejewelled take on Wizz's *When I Cease To Care* and Adam Leonard a rather plainer account of Wizz's *See How The Time Is Flying*).

All of those obvious cross-connections apart, the spirit of enterprise and adventure - and sometimes mild whimsy and eccentricity - that characterised Village Thing products pervades this tribute disc in the most stimulating way, whether the new versions set out to faithfully recreate the originals or reinterpret them for our time. Either way, they're a resounding success.

As far as I'm concerned, the wyrd the better - and the disc's first offering, Starless And Bible Black's brilliantly managed psychedelic take on Hunt & Turner's *Silver Lady* is a stunner in anyone's book, with Jane Weaver's spectrally scratched, primordial account of *Death* (which I too first encountered on Sun Also Rises' eerie VT version) and Katie Rose's superbly delicate, precise intoning of Dave Evans' *Grey Lady Morning* both easily equalling that opening gambit.

Other highlights come with The Owl Service's imaginative cover of Ian A. Anderson's *Time Is Ripe*, Pamela Wyn Shannon's tenderly beautiful and mildly exotic perfumed-garden rendition of Derroll Adams' wonderful *Love Song*, and Jason Steel's restless guitar figures in counterpoint to his fine account of Dave Evans' *Rosie*. The pair of contrasted, yet suitably idiosyncratic Al Jones covers (by Ben Mandelson and Corncrow) are splendid too.

In truth this is a tribute disc without a single duff track - and they're as rare as hen's teeth... The sheer volume of quality talent on the Rif Mountain label, outwith the "imports", is staggering, and arguably nowhere better sampled than here.