

## Rapunzel & Sedayne – SONGS FROM THE BARLEY TEMPLE (Folk Police Recordings FPR001)



In my book, any record with a liner note that describes (and uncannily accurately too, I might add) its opening track as “our old time field holler in the Javanese Pelog mode, inspired by the North American Tree Porcupines in Blackpool Zoo” just has to be heard straightaway, for you just know you’re in for an unusual (and most likely also unique) musical experience. For so it proves... time and time again during the course of this gloriously lengthy (close on an hour and a quarter) disc that never seems too long or overly drawn-out, such is the seriously magical spell cast by this tremendously symbiotic partnership. The wilfully enigmatic handles conceal Fleetwood-based Rachel McCarron and Sean Breadin, who have been purveying their own very special (if at times quite idiosyncratic) interpretations of

deepest tradition for many years now through a series of privately-released – and highly treasurable – recordings, also contributing to albums by other artists and most recently feeding into the acclaimed John Barleycorn Reborn project (as Venereum Arvum) and Folk Police’s Oak, Ash, Thorn collection. Both are incredibly talented musicians and superb singers, with an unrivalled passion for their heritage in all its guises and an alchemist’s knack for making something precious and original out of base materials. The press release’s description of their music as “skewed, otherworldly traditional folk” is only half the story, for this fulsome calling-card also contains some haunting original songs. Closely observing the dictum of recording almost exclusively live in the studio, with merest minimal afterdubbing, the duo gives us a feast of raw, immediate performances, accompanying their richly seasoned solo vocals and telepathic harmonies with instrumentation that’s both immensely varied (instruments played: kemence, violin, crwth, flute, five-string banjo, harmonium, frame-drum, drones and kaossilator!) and entirely stripped-down, almost primordial in its impact. Some of the album’s 14 tracks recall some of the weird simplicity – or simply weird – early ISB: not quite as ululatory, but equally riveting. Others (Handsome Molly, Silver Dagger) mirror the intrinsic simplicity of authentic Appalachian tradition, while Blackwaterside pays affectionate homage to Sandy Denny and the iconic Owd Grye Song is now blessed with a ghostly, shimmering new coat. Elsewhere, there’s two closely related “robin” songs: an early-music-inflected rendition of the Scots Robin Redbreast’s Treatment and a fresh reworking of Robin Sick And Weary. The disc’s centrepiece is an epic melding of House Carpenter with the contemporary I Curse The Day, a true masterpiece in atmosphere-building. Rapunzel’s other originals give further disc highlights, especially beguiling being Riverdance, a lament for an Irish ferry which foundered off Cleveleys some years back. And finally, in an inspired piece of symmetry, the disc returns us to its beginning with a backporch fiddle-and-banjo-backed reprise of the opening number. Songs From The Barley Temple is an extraordinary disc of extraordinary presence – literally tangible storytelling in music and words that’s uniquely inspiring in its essence and vibrancy, conveying that feral and spontaneous yet almost ceremonial sense of communing with the environment that’s key to their understanding of their sources. It’s a disc you simply must hear, and let seep into your soul, many times and at length.

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