

Avant-Garde Folk Duo Anna & Elizabeth join Smithsonian Folkways

Folkways debut 'The Invisible Comes to Us' set for March 30



'The Invisible Comes to Us' is a new album from the pioneering partnership of Anna & Elizabeth. Released on the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings label, the record is a spellbinding reconfiguration of ancient folk ballads that sees the duo's immersion in Appalachian music move to a place of boundless experimentation.

They combine two powerful and very distinct voices. Elizabeth LaPrelle was raised in rural Virginia and is frequently lauded as the finest traditional singer of her generation. Anna Roberts-Gevalt is a multi-instrumentalist and experimenter whose musical curiosity has taken her from old-time fiddling in Kentucky to a more recent immersion in Brooklyn's avant-garde community. Together they find new ways to tell old stories of love, loss and intrigue, while relishing the tension that arises between their very different backgrounds and orthodoxies; holding firm to the roots of the music, while removing the limits of how that music can be played and presented.

Joining the duo on 'The Invisible Comes to Us' are brass, woodwinds and synthesizers; drummer Jim White of The Dirty Three; and experimental pedal steel player Susan Alcorn, whose perceptive musicianship helped create the sonic worlds that Anna and Elizabeth visualized for these songs, a world that also brought in brass, woodwinds and synthesizers. The album was co-produced by Anna with Benjamin Lazar Davis from avant-pop outfit Cuddle Magic, who brought new technologies and tools to the pair's recording process; while his partiality for structure and detail acted as a welcome counter-force to Anna's more intuitive composing methods.

Many of the ideas for the record were stitched together during artist residencies that Anna and Elizabeth undertook at the MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, following a year of song collecting. The result is a record where the sounds themselves are integral to the retelling of these tales, alongside the sometimes cryptic and complex narratives of the sung and spoken words.

"These are songs we first heard in small archives in our home states, Vermont and Virginia," the duo wrote in the sleeve notes to the album. "Recordings made in living rooms and kitchens, of songs learned in childhood. The characters, and the landscapes they occupied, grew rich in our minds. This record grew out of the desire to show you the world we saw in these songs."

This is not an exercise in nostalgia, nor some notion of a simpler, purer time. Although Anna and Elizabeth aren't singing about their own lives, they've imagined themselves within the settings of these songs. Finding empathy, for example, in the heartbreaking loneliness of "Farewell to Erin;" pairing Elizabeth's piercing lament with drones and pedal steel that evoke an unchanging ocean. Anna's contemplative vocal that begins "Jeano" is suggestive of a woman full of wisdom with no way for her profound and true words to be heard beyond the small town around her. With a more inscrutable ballad such as "Irish Patriot," fragments of sound (inspired by the collage work of Philip Jeck) create a light-dappled forest from which the song's mysterious old man emerges. The troubled, meandering mind of the "Virginia Rambler" is illustrated by Elizabeth and Jim White's purposefully listless interplay. Throughout the record we hear a unique palette of influences that include Laurie Anderson, the poetry readings of Patti Smith, chopped storytelling inspired by NPR's Radiolab, Irish folk heroes Paul Brady and Andy Irvine, Dublin group Lankum, and the conceptual work of Meredith Monk and Fluxus movement composers.

With 'The Invisible Comes to Us,' Anna & Elizabeth are revealing what they find buried between the lines of traditional songs. The result is an immersive, novelistic and groundbreaking exploration of old and nearly-forgotten songs.

'The Invisible Comes to Us' Track List:

1. Jeano
2. Black Eyed Susan
3. Ripest of Apples
4. Irish Patriot
5. John of Hazelgreen
6. Woman is Walking
7. Virginia Rambler
8. By the Shore
9. Farewell to Erin
10. Mother in the Graveyard
11. Margaret

Anna & Elizabeth Upcoming Tour Dates:

Jan 30 - Rockwood Music Hall - New York, NY

Feb 3 - Irish Arts Centre - New York, NY

Feb 3-4 - Winter Hoot - Olivebridge, NY

Feb 5-8 - University of Colorado Boulder - Boulder, CO

Feb 9 - Tuft Theatre - Denver, CO

Feb 15-17 - Folk Alliance International Conference - Kansas City, MO

Feb 23 - Taylor Music Center at Union College - Schenectady, NY

March 15 - Merrimack College - Andover, MA

March 22-25 - BIG EARS FESTIVAL - Knoxville, TN

March 26 - The Straz Center - Tampa, FL

April 8 - Savannah Music Festival - Savannah, GA

April 10 - The Grey Eagle - Asheville, NC

April 16 - Creative Alliance - Baltimore, MD

April 18 - Park Church Coop - Brooklyn, NY

April 20 - Caffe Lena - Saratoga Springs, NY

April 22 - One Longfellow Square - Portland, ME

About Smithsonian Folkways Recordings:

Going into its 70th year, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, the "National Museum of Sound," makes available close to 60,000 tracks in physical and digital format as the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian, with a reach of 80 million people per year. A division of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the non-profit label is dedicated to supporting cultural diversity and increased understanding among people through the documentation, preservation, production and dissemination of sound. Its mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document "people's music" from around the world. For more information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, visit folkways.si.edu

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