**The Rails**

The Rails are running. English singer-songwriter duo Kami Thompson and James Walbourne have reached deep into their rich musical histories to concoct the kind of sharp, true folk rock blend rarely heard since the Seventies. Produced with indie legend Edwyn Collins and featuring folk frontierswoman Eliza Carthy on fiddle, The Rails debut album Fair Warning is a little wonder, packed with traditional and original songs that stand outside of time yet resonate with contemporary urgency. Recognising perfection when they hear it, Island records have revived their vintage Pink Label for the duo, home to John Martyn, Nick Drake and Fairport Convention.

“There is something about folk as an ideal that we were reaching towards,” says Kami. “Music by the people, for the people. Songs so icky, and potent, and heart wrenching, they could have been written five hundred years or ten minutes ago, it doesn’t matter.”

“We wanted something almost simplistic,” says James. “Singing, fiddle, electric guitar, no tricks. You can hear everything, it’s bare. It’s hard to convince people to make a record like that now but the sound is fantastic, it’s so direct.”

James, a teenage prodigy with a fascination for early rock ‘n’ roll and roots Americana, is now one of the hottest rock guitarists in Britain. Cult singer-songwriter Peter Bruntnell took him to the US to make an album and James went on to play as a member of such Americana icons as Son Volt and The Pernice Brothers and record with the legendary Jerry Lee Lewis.

Back in the UK, he has played with Ray Davies, become part of the touring line up for The Pogues and joined The Pretenders as lead guitarist in 2008. In 2011, he made his first solo album, The Hill, for Heavenly records. Author and fan Nick Hornby described his guitar playing as “an unearthly cross between James Burton, Peter Green and Richard Thompson” and enthused “Walbourne’s fluid, tasteful, beautiful solos drop the jaw, stop the heart, and smack the gob, all at the same time."

It was Hornby who introduced James to folk siren Linda Thompson, and James first met Kami when they both worked on Linda’s 2007 album Versatile Heart. “We hit it off on a musical level straight away but it took a long time to take that any further,” he reports.

Kami is the youngest daughter of Richard and Linda Thompson, the first couple of Seventies folk rock. She has been a backing singer with Linda, performed with members of the Wainwright family, toured with Sean Lennon and Bonnie Prince Billy and released her own solo album, Love Lies, on Warner Music in 2011.

“I suppose this was the music that was formative to me, but at the same time Folk was a box I didn’t want to be in, and I did my best to avoid it,” she admits. “In folk music, people love the idea of family. When a son or daughter picks up a guitar it’s like the legacy continues. In rock, it’s considered slightly nepotistic. They aren’t easy relationships and it’s difficult for me to talk about, so I think it’s better if I just don’t. I am a musician, and this is the music that was around me growing up, just as it was for many others, and I need to find my own way through it.”

Kami and James have been working together since 2011, romance blooming alongside their music. They married in 2012. “The less said about that the better,” says Kami. “Our long term goal is to make the perfect divorce album, obviously.”

‘Fair Warning’, their debut album, is produced by The Rails with Edwyn Collins and Sebastian Lewsley at West Heath studio, in North London. “They usually do more punky stuff there, so this was a bit different,” notes James. “It’s all analogue, old mics, the sound that comes out of that studio is really direct.” Cody Dickinson (Mississippi Allstars) was recruited to play drums, the great Danny Williams (Black Grape) played bass, Eliza Carthy added fiddle to a couple of tracks but mostly it was James and Kami.

Most of the songs on ‘Fair Warning’ are Walbourne / Thompson originals but the process started with visits to Cecil House, as so many artists have done before, to seek out lost treasures from the world famous folk archive. “We picked songs that we felt could have been written right now,” explains Kami. “‘Bonnie Portmore’ taps into our sense of endangered nature and fears about the planet. And ‘William Taylor’ is the ultimate bitch revenge fantasy for every guy you’ve had a shit time from. Those old murder ballads are my favourite songs ever, they give you permission to say something you’re not allowed to say in real life: I’d really like to kill you for fucking someone else.”

“It’s quite therapeutic,” adds James, wryly. “My folk music is really ’56 Elvis, that’s where I come from. I was introduced to Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music at an impressionable age, bands like Son Volt taught me a lot of American old time folk ballads, and they are all rooted in the old English and Irish ones, as I found out spending time with Shane McGowan and even Chrissie Hynde, she knows all this stuff. Who is to say what is folk anymore? These are our own songs but written with a certain sound and attitude that connects to music that came before.”

“Folk changed forever when we moved into a world of recorded music but the essence remains the same,” according to Kami. “To me the purpose of music is to feel the feeling multiplied by ten and get it out and have an emotional moment, be sad, cry, laugh, be angry. You make it so other people might feel the same way.”