

With the release of *Overnight*, Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker have brought us an album of wonder and depth. The classic quality of these songs, the meticulous beauty of the arrangements, the blanket-warm production and perfect pairing of exquisite vocals and virtuosic guitar is the culmination of everything these idiosyncratically talented musicians have been working towards since they first met.

For Rough Trade founder Geoff Travis, Josienne and Ben's 2014 album *Nothing Can Bring Back The Hour* quickly became his favourite record of the year. Bringing them to the label was a way of ensuring their unique music could continue to bloom and also reach a much wider set of ears. *Overnight* will be the duo's first album to be released in the US, with a tour to follow. In an interview with The Guardian, Geoff described Josienne and Ben as "a sublime and important act."

Despite being entirely self-financed, self-produced, self-arranged and released on the Folk Room label they co-run, *Nothing Can Bring Back The Hour* brought Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker an extraordinary and unexpected amount of attention. They won Best Duo at the 2015 BBC Folk Awards – a major achievement at any stage of an artist's career. And their ovation-stirring rendition of the traditional ballad *The Banks of The Sweet Primroses* at the televised awards ceremony prompted 6 Music DJ Cerys Matthews to invite them to appear in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* at The National Theatre. Josienne and Ben were incredibly honoured (and not a little daunted) to perform two original compositions in the production. The Financial Times review of the play said "Josienne Clarke sings like a haunted angel."

While much of their music is characterised by lush chamber ensemble orchestrations, what truly sets them apart is the combination of Josienne's divinely nuanced, emotionally affecting voice and Ben's intricately expressive, adroit guitar technique. They cite Sandy Denny, June Tabor, Nic Jones and Pierre Bensusan as respective influences but theirs is a captivating sound that's all their own.

Although Ben Walker (who grew up in Worcestershire) studied classical guitar from childhood and Josienne Clarke (from West Sussex) is a classical music degree dropout, both are keen to stress that they're "bog standard comprehensive school kids" who didn't benefit from a conservatoire education. The elegance and sophistication of their music comes entirely from their own discipline, rigour and craft. To emphasise the point, Josienne has been known to quip: "We're not posh, just pretentious!"

This self-deprecating humour is key to their much-loved live shows. Given Josienne's often devastatingly sad and poetic lyrics, and the frequently death and doom-laden nature of the songs they interpret, she feels it's only fair to lighten the mood. The misery, mirth and sheer beauty of their performances has taken them to such auspicious stages as Cambridge Folk Festival, Bristol's Colston Hall and London's Purcell Rooms. A far cry from the pub backrooms and sparsely attended acoustic nights where they began.

The way this duo inhabit songs that are sometimes centuries old, making them personal and present again, while also pricking the heart with their own tales of everyday love and loss makes the music of Josienne Clarke and Ben Walker a rare and precious thing.