



Piedmont Bluz Acoustic Duo
– *Ambassadors Of Country Blues*

Self-Release – 2019

12 tracks; 52 minutes

www.piedmontbluz.com

The Piedmont Bluz Acoustic Duo is Valerie and Benedict Turner. Based in New York state, the couple are dedicated to preserving traditional acoustic country blues and this

album features interpretations of some of their favorite songs, originally recorded in the very early days of audio recordings. Valerie sings lead and plays guitar, Benedict plays percussion and occasional harp and harmony vocals. The music throughout is well played and respectful to those who came before us and effectively created the blues genre and it is no surprise to learn that Valerie was mentored by the late John Cephas, another great custodian of acoustic blues.

The CD opens with “Ol’ Freight Train”, a gentle interpretation of Elizabeth Cotten’s “Freight Train”, blended with “Wilson Rag”, Benedict adding some appropriate train sounds on harmonica. Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie seem to be a big influence with two of their songs in this collection and their “Joliet Bound”, a song about unjust imprisonment, still has meaning today. It is always interesting to revisit the original sources of songs that we know and love from more recent versions and the Duo gives us “When The Levee Breaks” which is a very long way removed from the Led Zep version! Here we return to Joe and Minnie’s original with country blues guitar and simple but effective percussion which sounds like a wooden block being hit in rhythm. Later on we get Blind Willie McTell’s “Statesboro Blues”, a staple of the Allmans’ repertoire, and Ma Rainey’s “C.C. Rider”: both are quite sprightly versions but not a slide guitar in evidence!

Tommy Johnson’s “Canned Heat” was originally a warning about drinking denatured alcohol and, of course, became the name of a celebrated band from California. Valerie brings the feel of Delta blues on this one, aided by Benedict’s harp work. The traditional “Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor” has Valerie’s ringing acoustic and nice harmonies from the duo; one of the earliest versions of the song was Mississippi John Hurt’s in 1928 and John’s “Avalon Blues” is also covered here, remembered as the song that brought him back to public attention during the folk/blues revival of the 1960’s.

“Needed Time” is nowadays best known from Eric Bibb’s version but it was originally a rare gospel tune from the pen of Lightnin’ Hopkins and the duo give it a very respectful reading with harmony vocals through most of the song. The traditional “Beulah Land” is another spiritual tune (Beulah being a synonym for Heaven) and the arguably least well known song here, Geeshie Reilly’s “Last Kind Words”, is haunting and stark. Wanting to provide a whimsical end to the album the duo cover Rev Gary Davis’ instrumental “Whistlin’ Blues” with some attractive slide from Valerie.

Fans of well played traditional acoustic blues will find much to appreciate here.

Reviewer John Mitchell is a blues enthusiast based in the UK who enjoys a wide variety of blues and roots music, especially anything in the ‘soul/blues’ category. Favorites include contemporary artists such as Curtis Salgado, Tad Robinson, Albert Castiglia and Doug Deming and classic artists including Bobby Bland, Howling Wolf and the three ‘Kings’. He gets over to the States as often as he can to see live blues.