



Camelia Jade & Mike Antone

Strong Sun Moon

self-released; 2013

4.4 out of 5

*By Sean Dennison - The Even Ground*

Some very cool pedigrees with these two, who hail from Washington state. Camelia Jade plays the charango (a Bolivian lute that produces very light, delicate notes), the ronroco (a larger, baritone or tenor) and the bombo (an Argentinian drum that produces very thick notes), among other instruments that steer some of the music away from Western tradition. These she learned from her grandfather's fellow political prisoner when her grandfather was imprisoned in Chile in the 1970's. Mike Antone has been performing since 1998 and Neil Young even picked out three of Antone's protest songs for his Living With War Today website. Antone also placed fourth out of 300 on Neil Young's Americana Contest. Needless to say the bar is set pretty high for this duo.

Sure enough, the music has such lovely acoustic textures that it almost seems unfair these sounds were produced by only two people. Though primarily acoustic, the album displays a variety of styles, from the tropical to rustic, and a wide range of emotions. There isn't a single note that struck me as out-of-place, and indeed the two musicians communicate their harmonies with such grace that the music approaches therapeutic levels of tranquility.

Jade brings the exotica to the music, weaving instruments whose names you probably couldn't pronounce into Antone's guitar melodies. Most of these songs were recorded as live takes, giving the sound a gentle sparseness to it. Even to untrained ears, though, the music is deeply complex, spiritually and technically.

The two of them singing together, like on the soft avalanche of "Laugh Away" is a treat for the ears. Their voices, like their instrumentation, compliment each other.

It's funny how the simplest sounding albums can be complex to describe. I'm aware of what's going on in *Strong Sun Moon*; two individuals marrying two culturally different styles of folk music that share some of the same ethos. The sound is much tougher for me to crack. Yes, it's a bunch of acoustic strumming, plucking, sliding and some percussion. I know when the styles shift, Jade's quicker build-ups versus Antone's more even steel guitar explorations, for example, but it's still difficult to define,

I suppose that's where my enjoyment of this album primarily stems from, the challenge in deciphering the message these two present to us. *Strong Sun Moon* is a fantastic album, the kind that restores your faith in modern music, if it happened to have depleted at some point. The compositions are mixed with a loving grace that, for me, is almost unheard of nowadays. This EP is highly recommended. If I haven't described the music itself specifically enough, I hope my verbiage has done justice to the talents of Jade and Antone.

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