

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

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William Coulter and Benjamin Verdery, *Happy Here*

By Julia Crowe

Happy Here reunites Grammy-winning Celtic guitarist William Coulter and classical guitarist Benjamin Verdery ten years after their *Songs for Our Ancestors*. The new album features their spirited and exceptional arrangements of popular tunes, opening with an instrumental version of Eddie Vedder's "Rise" from the film *Into the Wild*. Their version delivers a decidedly sonorous pitch compared to the original, incorporating the vocal melody effectively to create a lovely, grounded, and sweet lullaby. They imbue Simon Jeffes's sprightly, upbeat "Music for a Found Harmonium" with ponticello color and a seamless exchange of rhythm between Coulter's steel string and Verdery's classical guitar. The duo's version of Cream's "White Room" opens with a hovering e-bow introduction by Coulter and, just when the arrangement threatens to become prettily soporific, they pull a Handel's "Surprise" Symphony effect of unleashing all the mad rhythms of the original with sneakily inserted quotes of other Cream tunes, ending in a flourish of "Sunshine of Your Love." Other highlights include the lyrical, striding pace of Seán Ó Riada's soulful "Women of Ireland," and Verdery's pensively heartfelt "Tread Lightly." Recommended. (Mushkatweek)

