



Songs For The Sparrows BIO

The third album from boundary-pushing bluegrass group Nefesh Mountain, *Songs for the Sparrows* opens on its majestic lead single “Wanderlust”: a gloriously cascading tale of two perpetual travelers setting out on a new voyage, slightly wary but unshakably determined. As the track charges forward at a full-tilt clip, Doni Zasloff and Eric Lindberg warmly impart words of reassurance, gently extolling love as a protective force. At turns radiant and pensive, wide-eyed and wise, “Wanderlust” ultimately embodies the delicate yet powerful sentiment at the heart of *Songs for the Sparrows*.

“This album is very much a celebration; it’s about adventure and endurance and pushing through the difficult times,” says Zasloff. “We’re looking at some painful things in these songs, but it always comes back to the idea of persevering and letting love be your fuel.”

Since their arrival on the scene in 2015, Nefesh Mountain has been hailed as one of today’s formative boundary-pushing bluegrass Americana bands. They’re among the first to truly give voice and openly represent Jewish American culture, tradition, values and spirituality in the world of American roots music. In a testament to the unbridled imagination and extraordinary grace of Nefesh Mountain’s musicianship, each track on *Songs for the Sparrows* ineffably evokes the sensation of roaming through the unknown. True to the album’s spirit of loving inclusivity, Zasloff and Lindberg dreamed up that elegantly wayward sound by melding elements of everything from Americana and Appalachian bluegrass to Celtic folk and Eastern European music. Not only a reflection of their vast musical knowledge, that open-hearted embracing of so many eclectic genres also speaks to the joyful curiosity that animates every aspect of their artistry.

The follow-up to their widely beloved *Beneath the Open Sky*—an album praised by *No Depression* as “one of the finest, wholly bluegrass records one will hear in not only 2018 but as a touchstone moving forward”—*Songs for the Sparrows* came to life at Sound Emporium Studios in Nashville, with Zasloff and Lindberg taking the helm as co-producers. Along with their longtime touring bandmates (violinist Alan Grubner, mandolinist David Goldenberg, and bassist Max Johnson), the New

Jersey-based couple joined forces with bluegrass royalty like Jerry Douglas, Sam Bush, and Bryan Sutton, whom they consider a formative inspiration on their deliberately free-flowing sound. “Jerry and Sam are part of this amazing group of bluegrass musicians who really blew the doors off the whole genre back in the ’70s and ’80s, and paved the way for folks like us to bring in all kinds of influences,” says Lindberg. “So, while this record is in many ways a celebration of American music, it’s also our attempt to introduce some otherworldly elements that you may not get from pure Americana.” In that spirit, Lindberg and Zasloff brought aboard Celtic phenoms John Doyle (guitar/bouzouki) and Mike McGoldrick (whistles) to help achieve this global sound. “Celtic music is such an integral part of our lives as American roots musicians” says Lindberg. “We wanted to share our love of Scots-Irish music in a number of these songs as a way to bring in a European influence, and for us was such an honor to record and collaborate with two of our favorites; John and Mike”

One of the most enchanted moments on the album, “A Sparrow’s Song” centers on ethereal textures and spellbinding harmonies hinting at Nefesh Mountain’s Eastern European roots. In crafting the track’s fable-like lyrics (“They say you’re small/Not worth a thing/But I know the truth/I’ve heard you sing”), the duo looked back on a life-changing trip to Poland and Ukraine in 2018. “We tracked down the towns where our families are from, and it was devastating to see the destruction of the Holocaust firsthand, and to know that we’re not so far removed from that time,” says Lindberg. “‘A Sparrow’s Song’ came from that experience, and from thinking about the many groups of people who are horribly discriminated against in the U.S.” Zasloff adds: “To us, sparrows represent a small but mighty voice. That’s why we chose to name the album for them—they’re often overlooked, but they’re beautiful and everywhere.”

All throughout *Songs for the Sparrows*, Nefesh Mountain illuminate its gift for imbuing old-soul wisdom into songs with a potent sense of urgency. On “Somewhere On This Mountain,” for instance, they deliver a confessional duet that precisely captures the anxiety so endemic to modern times but in the end provides some much-needed solace—thanks in no small part to the track’s softly shimmering tones and soul-soothing harmonies. Meanwhile, “Piece of the Sun” arrives as a bright and epic meditation on the courage of irrepressible hope, reaching a sublime fever pitch at its Celtic-folk-infused, sing-along-ready crescendo. As Lindberg explains, the song was inspired by the couple’s daughter Millie, and by Anne Frank (to whom “Piece of the Sun” is dedicated). “There was a time when Millie was three and she and Doni were in the car, and out of the blue Millie just said, ‘I think everyone in the world has a piece of the sun inside them,’” he recalls. “The song starts with that exact story, and then goes on to Anne Frank and the beautifully optimistic spirit she was able to hold onto in even the darkest of days.”

In their commitment to exploring new frontiers in their songwriting and sound, Nefesh Mountain also offers up such unexpected tracks as “Suite For A Golden Butterfly”: a nine-minute-long instrumental that musically encapsulates the story of a Jewish family from the Carpathian Mountains who flee to America to escape the Nazis. The exquisitely composed suite unfolds in five movements, closely following the family’s migration from East to West as each piece seamlessly segues into the next. Within that progression, Nefesh Mountain is joined by the distinctly Western sounds of Jerry Douglas, John Doyle and Mike McGoldrick, who together serve as an emblem of safety and hope in troubled times. And as the suite’s final movement, Nefesh Mountain presents “Courage and Grit,” a

sweetly boisterous piece subtly expressing that “we still need to be strong and steadfast in America, even in the 21st century,” according to Zasloff.

For the closing track to *Songs for the Sparrows*, Nefesh Mountain shares “Tree of Life,” a quietly stunning song written in response to the 2018 mass shooting at the Pittsburgh synagogue of the same name. With its heavy-hearted yet resolute lyrics (“I’m angry and tired of this great divide/But I sing nonetheless/With love on my side”), “Tree of Life” was first recorded and released by Nefesh Mountain just days after the shooting, and has since been sung at synagogues, churches, and interfaith groups around the world. “That line ‘But I sing nonetheless’ is a real theme to this record,” says Lindberg. “Regardless of everything that’s happened, all the things we’re talking about on the album, there’s nothing we can do but keep singing and keep putting out love.”

Both native New Yorkers with a lifelong affinity for bluegrass, Lindberg and Zasloff founded Nefesh Mountain in 2014 and released their self-titled debut in 2016. “Bluegrass and acoustic music have always spoken to us—something about the sound of acoustic instruments creates the perfect landscape for very truthful storytelling,” says Lindberg. Through the years, they’ve built a devoted following on the strength of that storytelling and their spirited live show, all while forging a deep kinship with luminaries like Douglas, Bush, and Sutton. “We’re so grateful to have these incredible musicians join us on these albums,” says Zasloff. “For them to throw their hearts and souls into this music and really understand this message of driving out the hatred that still very much exists in the world today—it’s so moving and emotional for us.”

For Lindberg and Zasloff, earning the support of their musical forebears is just one of several milestones that have empowered them to create an album as magnificently realized as *Songs for the Sparrows*. “Now that we’ve had the experience of playing to so many different audiences and hearing people tell us how much our music uplifts them, we know that it’s really working and fulfilling some kind of need,” says Lindberg. “Because of that, this album feels much bolder than previous records.” Indeed, in their constant journeying between genres and sounds, the duo endlessly reveals the fearless originality of their vision. And on account of that fearlessness, Nefesh Mountain convey the album’s message with an undeniable clarity—in turn leaving the listener profoundly more hopeful, and newly awake to the shared joy that’s possible in the magic of American music.

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