

Hope - wild carrot

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange

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Wild carrot is Cincinnati-based husband and wife duo of Pamela Temple and Spencer Funk. They have divided their time between Ohio Arts Council sponsored tours of schools and libraries and various acoustic venues. Pamela is a classically trained vocalist and Spencer is an extraordinary finger style guitarist. Their musical education and talents are married to a love for powerful melodies and lyrics.

Wild carrot's acoustic sound traces its roots to the music of the Appalachians, but the songwriting reflects influences of the finest modern songwriters. Pamela's vocals seem effortless as they center on the lyrics-obviously learning how to sing has not interfered with the front-porch intimacy of her style. Spencer's playing on guitar and mandolin, for all of its technical excellence, is melodic and understated. Pamela's beautiful and heartfelt lead singing is perfectly backed by Spencer's harmony vocals.

The effect of such educated talent being focused on producing straightforward melodies with sophisticated lyrics will simultaneously put you at ease and take your breath away. Wild carrot is all about the songs and Pamela is a songwriter of depth and breadth of influence. In her work you can hear classic songs of the mountains as well as the classic songs of Greenwich Village in the '60s. The first lines of *Bringing On the Rain* show a satisfying mix of elemental imagery and a modern sense of personal detail.

*It's raining again
Just like it did yesterday
Putting curl in my hair
And a curtain in the air on the mountain*

Bitter Blood is a tale of impregnation and abandonment told in the Gothic style of certain British Isle ballads.

*Whisper purple gifts to me
Bright as any plum
Then bleed the truth into my ear
Let the black juice run*

In a hysterical liner note to this song Spencer relates, "I went camping one weekend and came home to find Pam had written this allegedly fictional song. Well, I haven't been camping since."

Wild carrot covers *Light Enough to Find My Way*, a song by another duo influenced by traditional mountain music, Jones and Leva. Their rendition of this graceful song of hope in the hard life of coal miners is very similar to the original yet it distinguishes itself with wonderful musicianship and warm vocals. This is a song that deserves to be covered more often. They also cover Cindy Kallet's lovely *Tide and the River Rising* and *Running From Mercy*, a song that is a surprise to find penned by Rickie Lee Jones and Leo Kottke.

The second to last tune "These Songs," celebrates classic folk songs, quoting *Michael From Mountains*, *Turn, Turn, Turn*, *The Times They Are A-Changing*, as well as *Amazing Grace*. The album finishes strong with the title track *Hope*

that beautifully animates the words from two Emily Dickenson poems, *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers* and *Hope Is a Subtle Glutton*.

This is the kind of album that is pleasant on a casual listen with gorgeous vocals, strongly melodic playing and uncluttered arrangements. When you get around to listening more closely you will notice that the songs are life-sized-complex, subtle and powerful.

[Note: wild carrot is spelled in lower case in all of the duo's publicity so we have used lower case in the review for their stage name.]

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– **Michael Devlin**

