

Peter Phippen & Arja Kastinen

Forest of Thousand Songs



Two pure, languishing notes begin the tune **Night Born** on the album **Forest of A Thousand Songs** by flutist **Peter Phippen** and kantele player **Arja Kastinen**. A kantele is a Finnish zither that is associated with Nature by its very creation. This is no ordinary instrument however. Kastinen's deft hands transform it into many instruments. A zither for certain, but then occasionally a set of wind chimes, a samisen, and infrequently a harp. These eight World genre tracks on the album are neither East nor West, but omni-versal. Meaning the sounds are representative of this good Earth and conceivably beyond. They are more than just flute and kantele. Thunder, rain, birdsong, and more make an appearance. The album at times is an exercise in musical minimalistic splendor. At other times the music fills the spirit to the very top.

There is something incredibly ancient about the theme of **Night Born**. If Arja's kantele is cold, ebony sky, then Peter's shakuhachi flute notes are the white distant stars, complements to each other. The zither is harp like in this, a solitary note or two to echo the lonely voice of the flute. A wonderful beginning.

The gathering of what we now call the "Trembling Giant" or the colony of aspen trees is represented in the song **Aspen Meeting**. There is a somnolent sense to the flute as it drifts among the trees, wandering and hopeful. In the western United States, the Pando, another name of the aspen tree colony, is being threatened on many levels; fire, drought, and the encroachment of mankind. This is a beautiful homage to a kindred species where the zither is gently plucked among the haunting notes of the flute.

The name of the next song should pique anyone's interest. What a title. **Why do You Weep, Wooden Bark?** And yes, the music is somewhat sad. A solitary whistle echoes through this Forest of A Thousand Songs giving voice to the wind. The craggy contours of this barked creature hold a story inside. The combination of instruments are a polyphonic and sometimes, a discordant voice.

The tune **Sunbird** chimes with Arja's lightly strummed zither, landing here and there. Ever exploring. Cheery, but with a respectful tone. Peter's flute seems to create dappled light. There seems to be a tentativeness to the music, but that is to be expected with the clouds drifting by.

And the Great Oak Sighed is a form of musical Haiku. It features the subdued voice of Phippen's flute and sparse notes from Kastinen's kantele. With the muted roar of the wind, the music is nuanced in a Zen like cocoon of quietude, giving the listener a contemplative interlude. You stand under the enormous umbrella of the leaves of this huge oak tree and looking up, you wonder. The oak has been here for more than a hundred years and you marvel at the thought of the answers it could give if only you asked the right questions.

The kantele shines in the tune **Risen from Stone**, with just a bit of echo from the flute. It has the wind chime feel with more organization, but the story is still offered in a freeform manner. A tapping of percussion permeates the music as the unseen sonic sculptor chips away at everything that is not her or his dream. What remains is a miraculous thing.

The final tune is called **Ten Seeds**. The flute and zither are in perfect balance like water and sunshine. It reminds me of an old Greek proverb, "*A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit.*" Perhaps now is a good time for all of us to plant some seeds. The seeds may be from the oak tree or it may be a word of encouragement. It may be just a smile. You plant them now to get a reward in the future. "You've got this" as they say.

I liked every track on *Forest of A Thousand Songs* and I am loath to pick a favorite. They all qualify. This is my first encounter with the talent of Arja Kastinen, but I have had the pleasure of reviewing Peter Phippen before. I cannot wait for another collaboration from this brilliant duo. Highly recommended for meditative purposes and heavy relaxation.

– R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews