



Mara & David Call It Freedom

From the Darkness: Mara & David Find Moments of Collapse and Brightness on *Call it Freedom*

"It's such hard work, sometimes," reflects singer Mara von Ferne. "We lay down and we pace, we jam and drink cup after cup of coffee. Then there comes this magic moment from out of nowhere. It often takes a day or two, but then it all makes sense.

"Anyone in the room would notice this moment," adds guitarist David Sick. "It's in the air. There's a moment when the whole thing collapses, and the idea comes. Then the song is the song."

With an organic finesse captured in those key transformative moments, German singer-songwriter duo **Mara & David** meld rock drive with classical technique, turning personal trials into elegant musical statements. After a period of personal struggle—including an ongoing coming-to-terms with the duo's visual impairments—the two musicians have found a new sense of urgency and joy on ***Call It Freedom*** (Songways/Ozella Music; release date: **August 30 2013**), the follow up to *Sixteen Secrets* and *Once We Were Gods* (both on Songways/Ozella).



Mara & David's thoughtful songs—animated by von Ferne's sometimes earthy, sometimes delicate voice and Sick's stunning, percussive playing—move from childhood sanctuaries ("Cherry Tree") to personal crises ("Like A Stranger"). They grapple with the difficulties of finding an ethical, compassionate place in an unjust world ("Call it Freedom") and with turning the dark night of the soul into a burst of breathless light.

"As we were writing these songs, there was a lot of turmoil, private and health-wise, in our lives. But we came out of the darkness to better times, though we were still feeling quite vulnerable," von Ferne recalls.

"It was a gray dark time, but it turned into sunshine," Sick notes. "It's not a sad album, in the end. In fact, it's quite positive."

Mara and David began creating songs together seven years ago, after meeting at music school in Dresden. Their collaboration developed through hours of intense, intent rehearsal and dedication to finding that golden moment when songs take shape. That moment often comes early in the morning for the artists, during hours-long sessions together that often start at daybreak (a feeling captured in the evocative opener, "Early Morning").

Though clearly influenced by two pioneering generations of English-language singer-songwriters, performers like Joni Mitchell and Ani DiFranco, Mara & David's ears are wide open, and they are just as likely to cover Fleetwood Mac (the cheeky, sweet "Little Lies") or Portishead (the anthemic "Glory Box"), as to draw on classical chops. On *Call It Freedom*, Sick tunes the two lowest strings down a fifth on his nylon-string guitar, borrowing a technique from classical guitarist and composer Agustín Barrios to boost the bass and buoy von Ferne's voice.

"I listen a lot to rock, as well as singer-songwriters, and I mix those listening experiences with the technical approaches of a classical player," Sick explains. The drive of rock and funk powers Sick's percussive style, the perfect counterpoint to von Ferne's vocal delivery, often punctuated with lovely growls and purrs.

The bounce and beat serve to propel pieces that shine light on injustice and exploitation head on—and on the havoc they wreak on individual lives ("Break Down"). Yet the duo finds profound places of consolation, evoking a tenderness and deep, if sometimes fraught, connection to life.

"Cherry Tree" chronicles von Ferne's girlhood hours in her family's backyard cherry tree, a sanctuary edged by the eerie sounds of American jets flying from the nearby Landstuhl Air Base. "Happier Now" is both a letter and tribute to a close friend who passed away, who share von Ferne's unusual first name. "She died when we both were almost twenty," von Ferne says. "We were almost same age and we felt connected in a way, even though we were very different, almost opposites. I thought of her, even dreamed of her when we wrote this, and thought what would she think if she saw me now. I'm much happier now than back then."

This happiness has been hard won: Both von Ferne and Sick have dealt with visual impairments. Though von Ferne's challenges, caused by a mysterious disturbance of the optic nerve, have lessened somewhat over time, Sick is confronting a gradual loss of sight due to a genetic condition. "When you're losing your sight, you focus more on musical things," muses Sick. "It's a big relief to play music when I know my eyes will give up working at some point. I'm more focused on music because of it. I still play what I want to play and express, and if this means that I have to play very complicated things, I just practice harder."

Mara & David reached out recently to other sight-impaired people by performing at a school for the blind. The concert was conducted in complete darkness, a challenge and a welcome change for the duo. Sick's fret-leaping virtuosic style demanded extra practice to perfect in the dark, but both he and von Ferne found a new freedom as they performed.

"It was very interesting because we didn't sit there wondering what the audience was thinking about how we looked," Sick states. "There was just music and our sensations. Mara told me the same thing, that she felt very free in her movement, in her body. And our ears were very open. It helped the music and the concentration, to play in the dark."

"The duo combines creativity, expression and passion in an intoxicating way." *Akustik Gitarre*

"Mara & David are the new acoustic dream team." *Melodie & Rhythmus*