

Symbio "Rising" Gammalthea, 2018

This is the second album from a Swedish duo of accordion (LarsEmil Öjeberget) and hurdy-gurdy (Johannes Geworkian Hellman). Symbio is a nice short name, and *Rising* is actually a nice short CD which nevertheless provides a good introduction to this rather unusual brand of contemporary folk music. Symbio play traditional instruments, and their material certainly draws on folk styles from Scandinavia and further afield, but they approach composition in an almost classical way. Each track is centred around one or more motifs, instead of tunes, and the skill is in the arrangement and the layering of sounds, rather than the appeal of the melodies of members of Symbio are very skilful indeed, and their melodies can be beautiful - listen to the virtuosic *Hundred Years of Joy and Sorrow*, or the evocative *Secrets of the* to be Symbio's goal. Each of these tracks develops into a twisting, reflective interplay of two instruments, circling each other, hypnotic or explosive in their intensity. There is some use of electronic sound, including some electronic and sequencing, an obviously engineered sound on several tracks, and yet the overall impression is of a sparse and minimalist recording. This minimalism is designed almost-monochrome artwork on the CD cover and sleeve notes. The title track approaches mainstream folk from anywhere in Northern Europe, and shows the duo at their best, while the final *Together We Fly* is closer to jazz rock and has that experimental edge which glints enticingly but can also cut the unwary. *Rising* is something outside your comfort zone, but if you find the right mood it's an extremely rewarding album.

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