

SONGLINES

March 2010

Susan McKeown & Lorin Sklamberg **Saints & Tzadiks**

World Village 468089

Full Price (48 mins)



Odd couple make beautiful music together



Saints & Tzadiks is an unusual cross-cultural blend of Irish and Yiddish folk songs. Irish-born singer Susan McKeown and

New York-based vocalist Lorin Sklamberg (The Klezmatics) alternate between languages and traditions in a delightful mix of the commonalities and unique features of both cultures. Simple folk melodies feature guitar, fiddle and accordion throughout, as McKeown's rich alto voice perfectly complements Sklamberg's tenor. Both singers impressively weave pleasing harmonies in each other's language

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as well as in their own – with some in English too. The Irish material is culled from popular and traditional music; the Yiddish songs are drawn from Ruth Rubin's archive of field recordings. The broad emotional

range of the songs incorporates themes of love and death, betrothal and betrayal. The arresting first track, 'Heart's Blood', presents Scottish and Yiddish versions of the same tragic ballad ('The Cruel Brother'). In 'Prayer for the Dead' the Irish anti-war ballad 'Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye' is interwoven with a Ukrainian Yiddish lament from World War I. The two distinct melodies alternate and combine compatibly, leading into a moving 11th century dirge in Irish and Latin. In a different mood, 'The Rattlin' Bog' skillfully merges Irish and Yiddish melodies and one is struck by the similarity of the lyrics in both languages.

The hugely varied material on this disc and the many adept juxtapositions enlarge both the Irish and Yiddish traditions. The listener is offered a reminder of the universality of human experience and of how music can seamlessly celebrate difference.

Helen Beer