

The Berkshire Eagle



THE BEAT

Releasing the Burdens

by Seth Rogovoy

(GREAT BARRINGTON, Mass., January 7, 2004) – What the world needs about now is some pure, minimalist rock – some simple, straightforward guitar lines, maybe a dissonant chord here and there, plus some functional yet witty drumbeats. An occasional bass line would do to propel things along. Melodies should emerge organically from the chord changes, and understated, naked vocals should reflect lyrics stripped to the bone.

This wouldn't be artsy and overblown like the White Stripes – although it might tap into a similar impulse. And if the musicians were a husband-and-wife duo – and if the wife played drums, at once subverting the rock 'n' roll cliché while nodding to the Stripes and the more intelligently inclined Yo La Tengo – all the better.

Meet The Burdens, a Williamstown-based, husband-and-wife, guitar-and-drums rock duo, who are a dream come true, and who will celebrate the release of their terrific new CD, "Uh Oh," with a concert at Mezze on the corner of Main and Water streets tomorrow night [Saturday] at 9:30.

The Burdens emerged out of living room jam sessions between guitarist Richard Scullin, the group's chief singer and songwriter, and Karin Stack, who holds down the drum seat

and adds some accordion and marimba notes to some of the tunes. Scullin also wields a mandolin and bass, and a few guest musicians lend other instrumental touches, including harmonica, lap steel and organ. "Uh Oh" includes 16 songs with titles only a minimalist could love like "Oh No," "Sparse," "Unsure," "Dirge" and "Rain." The lyrics to the title track, a Dan Hicks-like, junk-swing tune, are "Roy G Biv" in their entirety.

It's an evocative album with an informal, homegrown feel, variously reminiscent of Yo La Tengo, recent Wilco, the Velvet Underground, Sonic Youth, Television, and early Talking Heads. Scullin is a deceptively modest vocalist, with an insinuating, yearning voice that draws a listener in with its implied intimacy and deft phrasing that at its best, as on "Blind Philosophy," recalls Elvis Costello.

"Right Now" skips along to a honky-tonk tempo, and "Oh No" is a bluesy, harmonica-inflected roadhouse romp. But even when they're at their most upbeat, the Burdens parlay an alluringly wistful melancholy.

When not plugging in, Scullin works at Village Ventures, the Williamstown-based venture capital firm. And when not pounding out beats, Stack works as an artist (her work can be viewed at www.karinstack.com) and freelance graphic designer.

The Burdens will also perform at Mass MoCA in North Adams on January 24, opening for storytelling collective The Moth.