

House and Land

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House and Land is the duo of **Sally Anne Morgan** (fiddle, shruti box, banjo, vocals) and **Sarah Louise Henson** (vocals, 12-string guitar, shruti box, bouzouki). Sally and Sarah started playing together after Sarah opened for **The Black Twig Pickers** for whom Sally plays the fiddle. The duo quickly discovered that they were both interested in the same very specific forms of traditional music. Additionally, they both viewed it through the lens of their shared love of modern, experimental and minimal music. *“We honor what two voices and bodies can do in one moment in time. It totally shapes our sound.”*



Their playing together is wholly unmediated, without amplifiers and using just two sets of hands and voices. With a minimalist approach, their music considers the space between notes as much as the notes themselves. The material on their debut is drawn from traditional southern hymns and Appalachian ballads that originated in England and elsewhere hundreds of years ago. Microtonality is as essential to certain Appalachian vocal styles as it is to a **Tony Conrad** composition and the often spare adornment to their singing puts these complexities on full display. The songs, however, are not entirely unadorned. Sally and Sarah are both masters of their instruments and on several tracks they bring in percussionist **Thom Nguyen**, who plays with an improviser's ear.

House and Land features many drone elements, which is a direct homage to the presence of drone in Appalachian music. Equally important is their knowledge of the use of drone in contemporary classical music, which itself has often taken inspiration from nature-based drone styles from around the world. This connection between nature and minimalism is not uncommon and can be seen in artists like **Agnes Martin** and composers such as **Éliane Radigue** and **John Luther Adams**. Repetition is linked to music across the spectrum that evokes trance and other spiritual states.

A historical review of ballads tells a history of patriarchy. These songs have been arranged for and by two women with an extensive knowledge of the form and filtered through their own feminist perspectives. In some cases, like in “Rich Old Jade,” their singing bears witness to the hardships women have endured. In other cases, they have changed lyrics to honor women through imagined histories. In “Johnny,” for example, “*My father offers house and land*” becomes “*My mother offers house and land.*”

House and Land's music is less adorned and certainly less processed than much popular music today. The hand-hewn quality transports the listener to another time the way a **Shirley and Dolly Collins** recording can. The themes are universal and the songs intergenerational. “Home Over Yonder,” for example, came from the singing of **Frankie Duff** of Lexington, Kentucky, who passed away in January 2017 at the age of 102. While there is a temptation to view this music nostalgically, this would be a mistake. This living music is constantly being rearranged. The obscure songs on this album, like many well-known traditional songs, are in a state of nearly constant evolution, a testament to their continued significance. Naturalistic and entirely modern, the music of House and Land continues this tradition with its own contemporary and beautiful interpretations.