

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

★★★★★

Rivers LEAF

Recorded in Iceland, two vinyl-only EPs *Retina* and *Iris* collected as an album.



On their previous albums (2008's *Heartcore* and 2009's *The*

*Snake*) husband-and-wife duo Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin specialised in song sketches that mixed soulful vocals with earthy percussion. The results varied in quality, veering from performance-art moody to self-conscious vaudeville. Here, however, they have ditched the quirk to make their most emotionally satisfying work yet. The highlights are crammed into the sea-themed first half on collaborations with the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir. Melding the bands' sparse instrumentation and Wallentin's pared-down vocals with the choir's gothic Greek chorus achieves a spellbinding effect. Dreamy, otherworldly, with an atmosphere akin to Kate Bush's work with the Trio Bulgarka on *The Sensual World*, *Rivers* is a record that will haunt you long after you've heard it.

*Priya Elan*

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

Rivers

LEAF

★★★★★

**Swedish husband-and-wife team's great leap forward**

The presence here of Fever Ray arranger Hildur Gudnadóttir and Björk collaborators Valgeir Sigurdsson and the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir give some clue to the artistic aims of Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin. But this third album leaves the ragged minimalism of the duo's earlier sets for dead. The 10 tracks hail from the two recent "Retina" and "Iris" EPs, with the first half showcasing a stunning hybrid of percussive art-pop and early choral music before the "Iris" songs weave Wallentin's dreamy vocal spells over tom-tom beats and steel pans. The results shimmer like rivers at dusk.  
*Garry Mulholland*

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

RIVERS LEAF



For all that's written about Sweden's drums-and-vocal duo W&P harnessing a primal urge to holler wildly and bang stuff, the two EPs paired here suggest rather more ingenuity is involved in their craft than simply awakening their inner troglodyte. With assistance from wintry soundscaper Ben Frost and the eerie incantations of Björk's preferred hired-hands, the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir, Mariam and Andreas tread gently this time. Emerging from a foreboding ambient mist in the 'Retina' half, they ring with hope on the stunning 'Iris' songs, steel pans flashing prismatic melodies around Mariam's soulful wallop like the dawn light through icicles. A fine evolution. *Chris Parkin* **8**  
**DOWNLOAD: 'Peeling Off Layers'**

## Mojo

September 2010

Priya Elan

## Uncut

September 2010

Garry Mulholland

## NME

21 August 2010

Chris Parkin

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

### Rivers

Leaf CD/DL

The Swedish husband and wife duo of vocalist Mariam Wallentin and drummer

Andreas Werliin have built an arresting repertoire of emotionally raw pop, drawing on blues, folk and soul, and presented with a minimal, garagey aesthetic. Running parallel to the gutsy punch of their work, there has always been a more delicate vision, and their third album is probably their most fragile yet.

The set brings together two recent limited edition 12"s, *Retina* and *Iris*, made in Iceland with Ben Frost. Recorded in Gudridarkirkja church, *Retina* features the 12 piece Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir, whose monastic harmonies sit beneath Werliin's basic drum patterns and Wallentin's brave, strident voice like a pillow of consolation on the church's cold stone floor. Its mournful sound somehow makes Wallentin's elliptical confessions even more vulnerable and open to scrutiny. *Iris*, recorded in a Reykjavik studio, is a more skeletal session, on which the drums and vocals are augmented by Wallentin's steelpan playing. Minimal, Philip Glass-like arpeggios and sparse clusters give the songs a mere hint of melodic form. Together, these two collections add up to a desolate statement that is naked enough to make listening feel like an act of voyeurism.

Daniel Spicer

## The Wire

September 2010

Daniel Spicer

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

### Rivers

LEAF. CD/DIGITAL

OUT 23 AUGUST

★★★

*Album of two halves from Swedish minimalists.*



**Swedish husband-and-wife duo**

Andreas Werliin

(percussion) and

Mariam Wallentin

(vocals) decamped to Iceland in January this year for a recording session that resulted in two water-themed EPs, *Retina* and *Iris*, now released together as this third album. The five *Retina* tracks are hauntingly intense, Wallentin's vocals backed by the same 12-strong choir as Björk used on *Medúlla*. *Iris* is far warmer-sounding, built as it is around Werliin's steel pans, which bring a splash of the Caribbean to this otherwise Nordic-sounding affair. In particular, *The Drop* and *The Lake* are beautifully realised.

**PHIL MONGREDIEN**

**DOWNLOAD: *The Drop* // *The Lake* // *Peeling Off The Layers***

## Q Magazine

September 2010

Phil Mongredien



## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

### Rivers

LEAF, £10.99 ★★★

• This enigmatically named husband-and-wife team from Sweden repaired to Reykjavik last year, to make two separate EPs. One, called *Retina*, was recorded in a church with a 12-piece chamber choir renowned for their appearance on Björk's *Medúlla* album. The other, *Iris*, was more soothing, mostly centred around Andreas Werliin's steel-pan percussion. Here, the two EPs are collected in one album package. The star, overall, is Mariam Wallentin's voice, by turns soaring and austere, or acrobatic and alluring. **AP**  
*Download this Iris: The Course*

## The Telegraph

21 August 2010

AP



## BBC Review

### Two EPs combine to make a single, beguiling long-player.

David Sheppard 2010-08-18

The third album from Gothenburg's connubial percussion and vocal duo Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin began life as two, 12" vinyl EPs released earlier this summer. Now spread over a brace of CDs – named *Retina* and *Iris*, respectively – *Rivers* is a fully-fledged album, echoing the EPs' division between imposing, choir-enhanced songs (*Retina*) and haunting, steel drum-propelled essays (*Iris*), all of it themed around notions of reflection, light and water.

Recorded in a week in Reykjavik, this is music inevitably imbued with Iceland's stark grandeur and glacial eeriness; even if Wallentin's strident but wounded vocals retain a distinctive blues quality (albeit a blues closer to the funereal ceremonials of [Diamanda Galás](#) than [Muddy Waters](#)). *Retina*'s opener, *Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood*, sets the first disc's tone; the wordless descants of the 12-piece Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Choir, arranged by cellist Hildur Guðnadóttir, interleaved with numinous poise behind Wallentin's oceanic incantations (turtles feature heavily) and Werliin's precise, airy percussion.

*Tiny Holes in This World* repeats the formula, the choir adding further layers of monastic atmosphere which contrast with Wallentin's worldly "I want to lie down with you" invocations. *Fight for Me* is the most clamorous thing here, with Werliin's pounding tom-toms to the fore, the choir verging on dissonance and Wallentin's vocals at their most theatrical – it's reminiscent of [My Brightest Diamond](#)'s Shara Worden in seriously spooked mode. *Peeling Off the Layers*' martial snare drums and sermon-like lyric ("Water Will Keep running / Rivers will turn) is as strangely beguiling as it is inscrutable.

The second disc eschews the choir but welcomes Wallentin's steel pan – an instrument more associated with bubbly Caribbean party music than desolate, Arctic Circle wistfulness. Using it to play minimal, repeating patterns, she leads pensive, introspective essays *The Wave* and *The Drop*, while Werliin busies himself with miscellaneous orchestral percussion oddities. Unlikely tropical intimations pervade the otherwise brooding *The Course*, lending an ominous song about giving away "a big piece of my black heart" an incongruous jauntiness, while closer *The Well* blends further loquacious steel percussion with the unbridled attack of a full drum kit, to more characteristically stirring effect.

## Tracks

- 1 [Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood](#)
- 2 [Tiny Holes in This World](#)
- 3 [Under Land and Over Sea](#)
- 4 [Fight for Me](#)
- 5 [Peeling Off the Layers](#)
- 6 [The Wave](#)
- 7 [The Drop](#)
- 8 [The Course](#)
- 9 [The Lake](#)
- 10 [The Well](#)

Tracklistings come from [MusicBrainz](#). You can add or edit information about [Rivers](#) at [musicbrainz.org](#). Find out more about our use of this data, and also our policy on profanity

**BBC Music**

23 August 2010

David Sheppard

## Rivers

### Wildbirds and Peacedrums

The Leaf Label

9/10

**A beautiful new record from this Swedish duo.**

It's telling that one of the most powerful, beautiful and profound records that we've yet heard this year doesn't feature a million dollar production job, nor a host of musical legends, enough hype to make Simon Cowell blush, or even a single note of guitar. From the anvil-crappingly heavy to the electrifyingly intense, via all manner of otherworldly grooves, fantastical complexities, and endless hooks, we've heard a hell of a lot of great music in 2010... But nothing quite like this.

You see, Wildbirds And Peacedrums focus on the very core, the heart of what made us fall hopelessly in love with music in the first place. 'Rivers,' the Swedish band's third album, is both divine and imperfect, elemental, but with incredible depth. For those who've never come across the husband and wife duo the formula sounds remarkably minimalistic, with Mariam Wallentin covering vocals and organ, via a bass pedal (and on the second half of this album, 'Iris', Steelpan) and Andreas Werliin covering percussion duties. Despite the apparent simplicity, the duo are able to conjure some truly haunting, unforgettable music. 'Rivers' is comprised of two EP's 'Retina' and 'Iris', which had previously only been available on 12", and which complement each other brilliantly. 'Retina' is the most immediately striking half of the record, Wallentin's rich, but fragile voice soaring on the unsettling 'Peeling Off The Layers' and primal, rousing 'Fight For Me' (which incidentally would be prime candidate for the band's most accessible track so far), alongside the multi-layered majesty of Iceland's Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir. It's expressive and bold music, but the duo never allow the wall of voices at their command to drown out the essential melody of their compositions. Recorded in an Icelandic church with a name that we can't correctly spell on this keyboard (approximately, Gudridarkirkja, minus some Icelandic lettering), 'Retina' has an incredible live feel, something that reminds us of how impressive the duo's performances can be.

'Iris' on the other hand is reflective, but no less interesting. 'Rivers' as a whole is rich with references to water, movement, and turmoil, themes that are explored throughout both EPs: if 'Retina' is the storm, thoughts and emotions swirling like an audible tempest, then 'Iris' is the aftermath, contemplative and understated. Werliin's minimal percussion and the steelpan and organ of Wallentin weave intoxicating atmospheres, which enshroud Wallentin's bruised, searching vocals. 'The Course' aches with hope, while 'The Drop' is in turns desolate and musically bright; it's not an easy listen by any means, but it pays to persevere. It's fair to say that this might be the first Wildbirds and Peacedrums record that many have come across, particularly for those who have only encountered the band since Werliin's involvement in Dan Berglund's Tonbruket project, and it's the perfect place to start. Simply enchanting, and an essential listen for the musically open minded.

[Click here to visit the band's website](#)

Rob Sayce

## Subba Cultcha

August 2010

Rob Sayce

## Rivers

Wildbirds and Peacedrums | The Leaf Label (2010)

By Bruce Lindsay

[Discuss](#)

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*Rivers* is beautiful; haunting, evocative, dreamlike, sad, confusing, scary and bewildering, it's a truly original work.

Wildbirds and Peacedrums is a Swedish husband and wife team: percussionist Andreas Werliin and singer and composer Mariam Wallentin. Werliin is also the drummer with Dan Berglund's Tonbruket, while Wallentin has been compared to [Nina Simone](#), although on this album she more closely resembles European singers such as Paula Rae Gibson or Propaganda's Claudia Brücken.



*Rivers*, the band's third album, was recorded over four days in January 2010 in Reykjavik, Iceland. The two CDs were originally released as two separate vinyl EPs—*Retina* and *Iris* (Leaf, 2010). Although both were recorded within this short time period, each has its own distinct sound and feel.

The *Retina* tunes are characterized by the magnificent sound of the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir, which has an ethereal, other-worldly sound, acting as a perfect complement to Wallentin's vocal. "Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood" exemplifies the sound: Wallentin's voice is pure and intensely emotional, while Werliin's percussion punctuates the tune, giving it a rhythmic centre while ensuring that his playing doesn't detract from the wordless choral vocal that is so crucial to the song's atmosphere.

"Under Land and Over Sea" is another song with a standout vocal performance from Wallentin, underpinned by the Chamber Choir without Werliin's percussion. The emotional intensity of the performance is immediately affecting—each word is sung as if Wallentin's life depended on it. On "Fight For Me," Werliin returns, his percussion to the fore, while both Wallentin and the choir deliver a strangely threatening and disturbing lyric.

On the *Iris* tracks, the sound is stripped back and percussion—including the rich sound of the steel pan—dominates. Wallentin's voice becomes more soulful and less tormented, while the songs themselves are more straightforward in construction. Less innovative than *Retina*, *Iris* is more readily accessible. All five songs have a lightness to their musical structure, while "The Drop" and "The Lake" are both lyrically intriguing.

This is one of the most original, affecting and intense albums to emerge from the contemporary European music scene. At times disquieting and complex, at others sweet and simple, the songs have a timeless quality and, in Wallentin, the band has one of the most distinctive singers around. *Rivers* is beautiful.

Track listing: CD1(*Retina*): Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood; Tiny Holes in this World; Under Land and Over Sea; Fight For Me; Peeling Off the Layers. CD2 (*Iris*): The Wave; The Drop; The Course; The Lake; The Well.

Personnel: Andreas Werliin: drums, percussion; Mariam Wallentin: vocals, steelpan, organ bass pedal; Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir: vocals (CD1).

## All About Jazz

8 August 2010

Bruce Lindsay

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums - Rivers

(The Leaf Label) UK release date: 23 August 2010

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by **Daniel Paton**

Wildbirds & Peacedrums have provided a breath of fresh air by doing something radical with the duo format. Attempting to create more with less, they have crafted music that is sophisticated and cerebral but also visceral and moving. In Andreas Werliin's hands, the drum kit could be more than functional, assuming textural and melodic roles. Mariam Wallentin's voice could unpredictably take flight and appear both passionate and brutal. Expression and interaction of this quality, free from indulgence, immediately elevates a band to a higher level. Whilst they are not promoted as a jazz act internationally, it's not entirely inappropriate that they have won a major jazz award in their native Sweden.

5  
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[Wildbirds & Peacedrums MP3s or CDs](#)

[Wildbirds & Peacedrums on Spotify](#)

Rivers compiles two vinyl EP releases from earlier this year (Retina and Iris), making the music available on CD and as downloads for the first time. The EPs are kept distinct on two separate discs. Whilst they vary in texture and mood, they also work remarkably well together, as if representing two sides of the same coin.

Wisely realising that the shock of the new can quickly diminish, Wallentin and Werliin have placed themselves in new musical contexts for Rivers. The five tracks comprising the Retina EP were recorded with the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir. This ensemble featured on **Björk's** Medulla, although a more suitable reference point might be the simultaneously icy and sensual intimacy of its predecessor Vespertine. The full list of collaborators is mouthwatering. Bedroom Community noise architect **Ben Frost** engineered the sessions, whilst the arrangements came from cellist **Hildur Guðnadóttir**. Bedroom Community label boss **Valgeir Sigurðsson** performed mixing duties.

Fortunately, the elegantly constructed music more than delivers on its promise. Deploying more subtlety and control does not restrict the group, but leads them towards something striking and profound. Mariam Wallentin's voice could previously tend toward overt dominance, but here it blends consummately with the choral harmonies. Werliin is similarly restrained, playing less cluttered patterns without compromising his innate musicality. This cascading music deftly combines austere arrangements with the physicality and empathy of spontaneous performance.

The most peculiar of these compositions (and 'composition' doesn't feel too lofty a term given how carefully these pieces are plotted) is Tiny Holes In This World, which is like a funeral march. It is weary, solemn and insidious, appropriately slow in casting its spell. Bleed Like There's No Other Flood and Fight For Me stand out particularly - with their slippery, imaginative melodic lines and gently propulsive rhythms. The captivating, naturally resonant sound of these performances convey both the group's confidence and their tenderness. Wallentin has found an elemental purity in her voice by stripping away affectations. The intuitive integration she achieves with the choir makes for richly textured and dynamic music.

The Iris EP, recorded without the choir, is closer in spirit to the rest of their catalogue, but with the duo now as comforting as they are confrontational. Where once anguish might have been Wallentin's dominant emotion, here there is a lingering sense of hope just beneath the surface. The music here is focused on the steel drum, which strikes a cautious note of optimism, as Wallentin sings hopeful lines ("After the sunrise, something better will come").

There are some typically inventive moments here. On The Lake, softly brushed drums follow the contours of a syncopated melody, the duo's extraordinary interaction breathtaking. The Wave exhibits the group's broad range, beginning with jazzy cymbal rhythms that eventually dissolve into a muscular groove worthy of **The Roots**. The Well concludes proceedings with impressive insistence - a performance of authority and conviction. It's as forceful as the fastest of rivers.

**MusicOMH**

26 July 2010

Daniel Paton

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

RIVERS [LEAF]



### VOICE AND PERCUSSION, ALL ELSE IS SUPERFLUOUS

"You used to be fun – all drinking and rock and roll and showing your

bum and stuff," I imagine percussionist Andreas Werlin's mates saying to him. "But since you've got married [to vocalist Mariam Wallentin], it's nothing but brilliantly propulsive, intricately-layered choral music hinting at the sublime with you. You've changed!"

Of course, in reality I know nothing of their marriage or Andreas's chums. Wildbirds & Peacedrums' third album, however, is hauntingly beautiful, from its harmonically lush first half ('Retina'), to the more melodically spare, marimba-accompanied second section ('Iris'). It's also constructed entirely from larynxes that vibrate and objects that can be hit, thus tapping into the very primordial beginnings of music-making. A small triumph.

**PATRICK FREYNE**

**KEY TRACK:** 'BLEED LIKE THERE WAS NO OTHER FLOOD'

### Hot Press

30 June 2010

Patrick Freyne



## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

Rivers

Leaf | 2010 | Album



Mariam Wallentin's hollow and pure vocals perhaps describe this work best when she sings, "Water will keep running / Rivers will turn." *Rivers*, true to its name, captures the purity, quiet power, and soothing effects of water and, simultaneously, uses it as a metaphor for the emotional landscape of the lyrics.

*Rivers*, the third album put forth by husband-and-wife duo Mariam Wellentin and Andreas Werliin, is comprised of two previously released EPs, *Retina* and *Iris*. Both recorded at the same with the same production team (Ben Frost and Valgeir Sigurðsson) in Iceland, the two EPs still capture decidedly different soundscapes.

*Rivers* leads off with the five tracks of *Retina*, which capture the immersive quality of water in their sound. Wellentin's lead vocals, backed only by the pseudo Gregorian chant vocals of the Schola Cantorum Reykjavík Chamber Choir and the often minimal percussion provided by Werliin, envelop you in a nearly religious sense; you don't so much listen as feel this music, which seems to exist in a trance. This trance turns into a nearly ritualistic dance as the drums and choral vocals take on a more percussive character in "Fight for Me."

That style carries into the tracks from *Iris* which seem to look at the water more than become immersed in it. Primarily defined by the use of steel drum, Wallentin's latest interest, the *Iris* tracks live in a pretty sound between island music and smooth jazz, creating a soothing mix, but the carefully handled sonic fabric of the *Retina* tracks is missed.

It's most impressive what the duo achieve on such intentionally limited resources. Remember as you listen this record that everything you're hearing was created simply with vocals and percussion. Armed with that alone, Wildbirds & Peacedrums create a wonderfully rich, textured, and deep sound world that many musicians, classical to synth-reliant, could learn from.

**Katherine Baltrush**

### Kevchino

July 2010

Katherine Baltrush

# MINIMALIST BRILLIANCE

POP

## WILDBIRDS AND PEACEDRUMS

Lexington, NI

★★★★☆

DAVID SMYTH

SWEDEN'S chief export now seems to be brooding crime fiction instead of perfect pop, so the spooky, minimal sounds of married duo Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin from Gothenburg are a far more appropriate modern soundtrack than Abba.

Their musical decluttering essentially consists of Werliin's sensitive drums and Wallentin's extraordinary voice, deep and powerful, with added friction. On their albums, the third of which was released this week, they also employ more melodic percussive instruments such as glockenspiels and ghostly massed backing vocals, to be provided by The Roundhouse Experimental



**CDs OF  
THE WEEK**  
Page 34

Choir when they perform at Islington's Union Chapel in November.

Here they added only Wallentin's steel drum, made to sound like a very different beast from the one we hear playing Caribbean Christmas carols outside Selfridges. It tick-tocked hypnotically on Chain of Steel and gradually became ever more complex on the slow-building climax, My Heart.

Hearing so little on stage was like undergoing sensory deprivation. Every noise took on greater significance, from the roar of the air-conditioner to the soft gush of lemonade being dispensed in the bar at the back. The sparseness went a bit far when a roadie appeared, apparently solely to pull out Wallentin's microphone cord and ruin the song, but mostly this was music at its most primal.

Wallentin was a revelation, giving her voice freedom to roam. Sometimes she concluded a song dazed, looking around as though surprised to be in a pub full of people – completely transported by her music. So was I.

**Evening Standard**

27 August 2010

David Smyth

**Wildbirds and Peacedrums**  
Bishopsgate Institute, London  
★★★★★

Wildbirds and Peacedrums make music as stripped-down as their name is convoluted. The Swedish husband-and-wife team Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin weave spells with percussion and voice: Wallentin huskily intoning as her spouse attacks his drumkit with alternate restraint and abandon.

The duo's debut, 2007's *Heartcore*, won Sweden's premier jazz prize; its follow-up, *The Snake*, added greater rhythmic intensity to their ethereal musings. The pair are now releasing two vinyl-only EPs, *Retina* and *Iris*, from which 10 songs were debuted here.

On vinyl, tracks such as *Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood* and *Tiny Holes in this World* can sound as mannered and precious as their titles, but live, they gain an animalistic intensity. Wallentin is a vivacious performer, clawing at the air and appearing transported when she growls the spectral love lament *Under Land and Over Sea*.

Recorded in Iceland, the sparse new material has a similar focus on the human voice as Björk's equally minimalist 2004 album *Medúlla*, and tonight the duo are joined for half the set by the blue-smocked Schola Cantorum Reykjavik chamber choir. On *Fight for Me*, their phantom vocals were a breathtaking counterpoint to Wallentin's pagan-like incantations and Werliin's loose-wristed, tribal drumming.

The haunting *Peeling Off the Layers* sounded like a eulogy for every failed romance ever. For the encore, Wallentin abandoned her mic to chant a cappella as she led the crowd in a bewitching musical hybrid that might be called glacial art-gospel. It may never catch on, but it sounds fantastic.  
**Ian Gittins**

**The Guardian**  
18 May 2010  
Ian Gittins

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

**Intoxicating, operatic blues-pop**  
Bishopsgate Institute, Saturday

Andreas Werliin is the drummer and percussionist with Wildbirds & Peacedrums and is fêted for his compelling tribal polyrhythms. He's explained how he and his musical and life partner, the awesome-voiced Mariam Wallentin, work together: 'It starts with Mariam writing some lyrics. Then we'll fight and walk around in the practice room for an hour or two, trying out different sounds and rhythms.' It's couples therapy of a kind, we guess, although we doubt that Relate would recommend it.

This duo make the most extraordinary... well, it's hard to say exactly *what* their music is. Werliin has said he'd like to tour with Tina Turner, duet with Tom Waits and play the steel drums on an Arvo Pärt piece – so not much help with the pigeonholing there. W&P's homeland once crowned them Swedish Jazz Act of the Year, but that

tag applies only to their work's improvisational nature. What figures far more strongly is the mix of subtly dramatic, wildwood blues and textured, hook-aware avant-pop that's surfaced on two albums to date. Now, W&P add massed choral grandeur to their gorgeously unsettling arsenal.

On May 24, the pair will release 'Retina', the first of two vinyl-only EPs, with the second, 'Iris', due out in June. 'Retina' features Iceland's 12-strong Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir (who sang on Björk's 'Medulla' LP). Their sumptuous, understatedly eerie vocals blast W&P's sound into the stratosphere, sounding both *très moderne* and as ancient as an Icelandic glacier. Pesky volcanic ash clouds permitting, this celestial choir will be helping Wildbirds & Peacedrums lift the roof off the Bishopsgate Institute in what will be a very special experience indeed. *Sharon O'Connell*

Further watching:  
[www.tinyurl.com/TO-wild](http://www.tinyurl.com/TO-wild)



W&P pictured at their recent show in Nashville

**Time Out**  
13-19 May 2010  
Sharon O'Connell



## wildbirds & peacedrums: iris EP



### 8 Wildbirds & Peacedrums Iris EP

Swedish husband and wife team Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin present the second vinyl-exclusive EP in their set of Icelandic recordings that combine to make up their third album, *Rivers*. A companion piece to the more musically dense *Retina*, which made use of the dozen-strong Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir, *Iris* provides an austere counterpoint, concentrating on the resonant sound of the steel pan drum. These Trinidadian instruments forced up against the Nordic vocals and crisp percussion conjure an intriguing, otherworldly atmosphere. The steel pans – at times sounding like undulating waves, at others like percussive water droplets – combine with the watery song titles ('The Wave', 'The Drop', 'The Course', 'The Lake', 'The Well') to form an abstract as well as literal theme.

The starkness of *Iris* compared with the grand, choral lushness of its companion piece is marked, and yet somehow it contrives to sound warmer, the steel pans inevitably providing a subconscious tropical island setting to melt some of the northern ice. But it's Wallentin's glistening vocals and finely tuned lyrics that lie at the heart of the record. She sounds confident yet fragile, her voice impacting with a surprisingly soulful edge and a focused control that is used to greatest effect on *Iris* centrepiece, 'The Course'. Here, the mould created by the rest of the record is broken with a momentum that would no doubt enthrall in one of the duo's notoriously dramatic live shows.

Final track, 'The Well', with its vortex of percussion, sounds oddly intimate and at the same time fiercely individual, underlining the fact that the music of Wildbirds & Peacedrums remains unclassifiable. It veers at times towards the jazz or folk idioms, Wallentin and Werliin always keep one foot on experimental ground. They predictably provoke comparisons with Björk – the benchmark for adventurous, emotionally raw music – but have found their own signature sound with these EPs.

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS – IRIS EP (LEAF)

★★★★★

By: [Liane Escorza](#)

Since I listened to *Retina*, the first in this set of two limited edition vinyl EPs from this inimitable Swedish duo, I've been eagerly waiting to lay my hands on its follow up *Iris*, both of which will ultimately be issued as a double album under the name *Rivers* on 23 August.

Suffice to say that this *Iris*, as with its predecessor, offers a unique reinvention of gospel, soul, blues and pop nous. Yet *Iris* has a very distinct character, the sonic landscapes it achieves carrying a raw, dry tone while keeping the intimacy and aquatic theme of the preceding, sister EP flowing just perfectly.

Combining drums and percussion with vocals and steel pan drums, which have become Mariam Wallentin's favourite addition to their textured sound, *Iris* contemplates sorrow, passion, and love on the surface of the eye. It offers more of a reflection of light than the shadows that haunted *Retina*, in which the interiorising of those rough feelings formed a darker sound, built up layer upon layer with the aid of choral work.

Still, the honesty of this second work is as integral and rounded as it was in the first. 'The Wave' finds Mariam's steel drum rippling and splattering in celestial emissions and is followed by 'The Drop', a delicate and uneasy awakening from a turbulent dream. 'The Course' brings Mariam's already masterful singing to a new level, diving deep into emotional lakes, and amazingly, 'The Lake' turns itself into a runaway stream with glittering lights bouncing on its surface, intensifying as the song progresses.

Regardless of current musical tendencies towards swelling atmospheres, icy contexts or expansive states of mind, one thing is clear about Wildbirds & Peacedrums' work – few bands sound more inventive, attuned to one another, or indeed, this alive.



## Rock Feedback

28 July 2010

Liane Escorza

## Wears The Trousers

25 June 2010

Lucy Brouwer

**F**rom their bizarre name to their experimental style, Wildbirds & Peacedrums have never been what you might call mainstream. The news, then, that their next album is to be released first as the two conceptual, vinyl only EPs *Retina* (24 May) and *Iris* (21 June), which will then be compiled together and released as the full album *Rivers* on 23 August should not come as too much of a surprise. In an attempt to convey the relationship between the surface of the eye and the surface of the water on the respective EPs, the Gothenburg-based duo have worked with the same 12-strong Swedish choir that feature on Bjork's *Medulla* album, as well as the choral arranger, Hildur Guðnadóttir, sound artist and engineer, Ben Frost, and producer, Valgeir Sigurðsson (Camille, CocoRosie, Bonnie Prince Billy). The result is a characteristically beautiful – and successfully conceptual – oddity. We caught up with one half of the duo, Mariam Wallentin, to see how the magic happened...

**The new EP (*Retina*) is just about to come out. How does it sound?**

It sounds big and small, grand and intimate. It's not up to me to say how it sounds really, we just do, it's up to the listener to transform and carry the music. But I'm very happy with the two EPs, they complement each other very well and together they create an atmosphere that I think can take you somewhere.

**You recorded it in Iceland with the Schola Cantorum Reykjavík Chamber Choir? Why did you decide work with them?**

We really felt that the Icelandic choir sound would complement our band sound very well. Being a contrast and adding something more to our sound, or something that we wanted to capture but couldn't create by ourselves. The more clean, pure sound in the choir was what we were after and also what we got.

**Tell us about the writing/recording process for the two EPs.**

The writing process is always tricky and a bit painful and hard. I started writing the lyrics this autumn and that took some time; I knew what I wanted to explain but it always takes some time finding the right words for it. Then me and Andreas (Werliin) recorded drafts of the songs just before Christmas to send to Hildur, and that process also took some time, finding the right melodies, the perfect rhythms and a good balance to make it full and complete but still leave space for the choir. Then Hildur started working with the arrangements just after the new year, and we Skyped and bounced the material back and forth a lot to find the right sound for the arrangements. That process was more intense and fast, Hildur worked intensely for a couple of weeks, and then it was time to travel to Iceland to record it. The choir was very professional and calm, they hadn't had time to rehearse the material that much beforehand but did a great and focused job. I think we both rehearsed and recorded each song with the choir in only about two hours each! That was so amazing, to finally hear the songs for real for the first time. A kind of relief. This is how it is... Here we are, no turning back.

**You're releasing the album as two limited edition EPs. Why did you decide to release it in this way?**

Because they sound very different, but still belong together. *Retina* sounding quite big and wet and of course our sound with a choir is special. *Iris* is more intimate and pure and just another way of feeling the same kind of things. The choir can sound like a swelling ocean, while the steel pan has a more vivid and shimmering water sound.

**Did you have the concepts for the EPs planned before you started the writing? What inspired the themes?**

Yes. I've been quite hooked up with water reflections, like the light captured in the surface of water. Something that is there but

**Always keen to confound expectations, Wildbirds and Peacedrums have now adopted a style and arrangements that owe as much to contemporary classical music as to the world of pop and folk**

is hard to grasp. That inspired the titles for the two EPs. The surface of the eye versus the surface of water. And water can symbolise so much, like the depth of your own emotions, like the feeling of drowning or floating, or the power of the ocean, or that we are mostly made out of water ourselves. I could go on forever talking about this (haha) but as long as I somehow captured a single flair of all this in the lyrics and we combined all this in the music, then I'm happy.

**Do you think the two records will work just as well as one album?**

I hope they will work as one album! For me they do because they are linked both lyrically and thematically. Everything, all emotions and everything we feel and go through has many different sides and that's what we wanted to capture. We have always been quite schizophrenic in our music, people having a hard time labelling what we do and how we sound. This was just a way for us to still do what we wanted without making the music pay for it. Keeping it clearer for the listener.

*Wildbirds and Peacedrums play the Bishopsgate Institute on 15 May*

# Water Music

**London Tour Dates**  
14 May 2010  
Michael Wylie-Harris

# PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

single of the month



Ric Rawlins finds himself in a world of spookiness with a strange new EP...

Wildbirds and Peacedrums

Retina EP  
(The Leaf Label)



It may seem an obvious thing to say, but the idea of monks has never really

turned me on in the past; all that isolation, all that lack of sex - sure I enjoy watching them beat the crap out of each other in The Da Vinci Code movies, but that's about as far as it's gone.

Until now! Because although Wildbirds & Peacedrums sound

distinctly monk-like, you can also imagine their brotherhood being vampiric in the romantic sense; a 17th century vision of candle-lit sacrifice, a secret society that's actually worth bothering with (as opposed to all that regular mason crap).

Their new EP is the kind of record you'll seriously worry your friends with by playing; choral meditations like 'Fight For Me' sound like pure ancient magic, revealing tales of betrayed heroines, deaths in caves and forgotten languages. Stick it on in the sixth form common room and the bullies will assume you're a black magic motherfucker from hell.

Yet this isn't a record to scare people with, and people will take their own interpretations from its unearthly sound. Tracks like 'Under Land and Over Sea' are pretty real simulations of a sixth sense, and without meaning to sound trippy, they connect with the part of your brain which evolved to register spirituality, but which hasn't quite melted away in the shadow of the universal mind, AKA Twitter. Hmm. Maybe that does sound trippy.

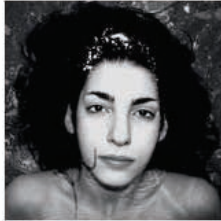
Right! Conclusion time: this EP is great. Get it now or don't get laid.

*Ric Rawlins*

Out 10 May



**Artrocker**  
June 2010  
Ric Rawlins



## Wildbirds and Peacedrums *Retina EP*

Type: Album Release date: 10/05/2010

Artists: [Wildbirds and Peacedrums](#)

Label: [Leaf](#)

Your Rating:

[Review this release](#)

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by [Richard Wink](#)

0 comments 09:48 May 6th, 2010

Experimental folk? Nah, don't pigeon-hole **Wildbirds & Peacedrums**. They are an evolving musical entity, pushing their limitations beyond what anyone else would dare imagine. With Mariam Wallentin's strange ménage à trios vocal (Think Bush, Simone and Minelli battling to the death in a bile ridden larynx) and Andreas Werliin's erratic percussion, the married duo travel beyond what is anticipated. If you're a Scandinavian act then you tend to get more of a licence to be out there - exuberance and extravagance is encouraged. Being weird is accepted and expected. But by the grace of God there is some actual substance to this music, and that my friends is something beautiful.

It is evident on this EP that Wildbirds & Peacedrums are expanding their sound. Working alongside the Schola Cantorum Reykjavik Chamber Choir, the duo's natural minimalism is galvanized by the majesty of harmonious tranquillity.

'Bleed Like There Was No Other Flood' reminds us about the duo's key traits. Sparse, oddly stormy percussion punctuating the bewildering vocal layers that flow from Mariam Wallentin's unique lead, and then there is the overwhelming sense flowing through this song that life is but a prelude to the long chasm of bleak nothingness. The tone of this album is wedged in a war between natural wonder and human decay, temporary streaks of light against an infinity of darkness.

'Tiny Holes In This World' slowly trudges along a drag your feet drum beat. Wallentin's scattered words seem to find it difficult to find a place within the rhythm, with the choir acting as audio polyfilla. It's a bit of a mish-mash effort and somewhat stilted proceedings. 'Under Land And Over Sea' compensates for the previous track with Wallentin's voice silvery and pure, floating in the morning mist. I've got to avoid using the word 'haunting' to describe this one, need to look in a thesaurus and find another word. The track feels cold like a marble slab on an December morning, the hand of death stroking the nape until goosebumps rise from pale skin.

'Fight for Me' is a pounding dose of tribal warfare which reminds me of the visceral natural sound found on the duo's second album *The Snake*. Wallentin is able to express her intentions far better than Cheryl Cole was able to when fighting for love. The echoes spew from the choir, bashing against cathedral walls, knocking fortitude into tame rubble. 'Peeling Off The Layers' provides the wow moment, with Wallentin reaching a strange level of greatness. Florence, this is how you epically warble.

Presented in a more digestible dose, the length of this EP complements the awe on display. Where as *Heartcore* and *The Snake* perhaps diluted some of the magnificence of Wildbirds & Peacedrums we as listeners are given room to absorb what our ears are confronted with. The percussion is identifiable, it has character, and it sets not only tempo but mood. Mariam Wallentin's vocals astonish throughout, despite the tendency she has to border on the melodramatic. *Retina* is only part one with a second EP titled *Iris* to follow this coming June. What brave new world can these intrepid travellers unveil next? For now, *Retina* is the perfect example of what creatively can be achieved within the structured confines of the EP format.

Wildbirds and Peacedrums

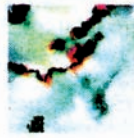
8 / 10

**Drowned in Sound**  
May 2010  
Richard Wink

## Wildbirds and Peacedrums

The Snake

★★★★★



(Leaf) £12.76

Swedish husband-and-wife duo Wildbirds and Peacedrums are closer to Siouxsie and Budgie's Creatures than the White Stripes. With Mariam Wallentin's striking vocals and Andreas Werliin whacking the hell out of his drums, the effect is perhaps what Siouxsie would have sounded like singing on Cozy Powell's 1970s drumming hit Dance With the Devil. Werliin is a breathtaking, tribal tubthumper, while his wife has a few blues strings to her bow, with hints of Janis Joplin, PJ Harvey and, in gentler moments, Antony Hegarty. In full flight, the effect is sensual, pulverising and mesmeric, as Wallentin cries out lyrics such as: "There is no light, my eyelids ache" and "She's got a hold of me, in a nasty way". What it all means is anyone's guess, but listen closely and you can hear them throwing in Motown keyboards, steel drums, xylophones and presumably a job lot of kitchen sinks. **Dave Simpson**

**The Guardian**  
10 April 2009  
Dave Simpson

## Wildbirds and Peacedrums: The Snake (Leaf) £12.76

More than smart recession-proof strategists, this Swedish, married drums-and-vocal duo make raw art from mangled, minimal blues-folk.



Mariam Wallentin's vocals evoke a tribal Bjork; Andreas Werliin, him indoors, works freaky percussive wonders. Lively tunes put icing on the primitivist cake, to rough but fully cooked effect. A wild trip, indeed, but it might catch on yet. ★★★★★

**The Independent**  
11 April 2009  
Kevin Harley

## 31 WILDBIRDS AND PEACEDRUMS

The Snake (Leaf)

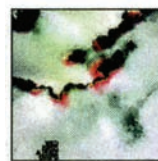
A ★★★★★

This Swedish husband and wife duo make a refreshing change from the endless longships of pop ironists embarking from Scandinavia. And with this second album cementing the union between Mariam Wallentin's impassioned gut-bucket vocals and Andreas Werliin's busy percussion, they are on their way to becoming the White Stripes in reverse. **BT**

**Observer Music Monthly**  
March 2009  
Ben Thompson

## Wildbirds and Peacedrums

The Snake (Leaf) £12.76



If music be the food of love, then this Swedish husband-and-wife duo should be fit to burst. Mariam Wallentin sings paeans to Andreas

Werliin, who in return complements her songs with sympathetic free-jazz drumming and occasional keys. Their songs are sparse and experimental: Wallentin skips between the delicate trill of Björk, the raw soul and funk pop of Prince and the beat-box ingenuity of Camille. Not everything works – there is some ill-advised Whitney-style warbling – but this album is more focused and honed than last year's folkier debut. **KATIE TOMS**

**The Observer**  
12 April 2009  
Katie Toms



## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

MEET THE SWEDISH DUO DRUMMING UP A STORM ON THE LIVE CIRCUIT

Since hooking up at Gothenburg's Academy of Music and Drama in 2004, Swedish duo Wildbirds & Peacedrums have forged an unholy hybrid of left-leaning pop and swampy blues that skilfully shifts between brutal pagan rhythms and improvised yelping. Helmed by husband and wife duo Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin, the pair delivered their bewitching debut album *Heartcore* last year and just followed it up with their second offering, *The Snake*.

It's onstage, however, where the connection between the couple really comes into its own, with Werliin's free jazz rhythms working off Wallentin's uninhibited wailing. "We've never had any formula; it's always been a case of just believing in each other," says Werliin. "We both feel like we need to be in charge all the time because we have the same star sign. That helps the shows be as explosive as possible." *Andrew Fenwick*

[myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums](http://myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums)

**Dazed & Confused**

June 2009

Andrew Fenwick

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums Interviewed: Keeping The Beat

— Frances Morgan, May 7th, 2009 04:29

Frances Morgan talks to Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin about new album *The Snake*

ADD YOUR COMMENT



The name evokes hypnotic whimsy; ethereal flutes and tropical forest rhythms called up by avian spirits and ghost shamans. Yet the sound made by Swedish duo Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin is foot-stompingly, heat-beatingly, exhilaratingly and committedly *human* – and refreshingly so, in a music landscape full of hazy, layered indie-tropicalia.

It is not that Wildbirds and Peacedrums don't make psychedelic music: Wallentin's freeform vocals curl and pop like woodsmoke and sparks around her husband's shape-shifting drums, embroidered with pitter-patters of tuned percussion and the odd autoharp drone. It is not that their new album, *The Snake*, out now on The Leaf Label, isn't full of mystery, contrast and dreamy theatre. What it isn't, though, is vague. Sonically and emotionally, Wildbirds and Peacedrums make music that's right up close, in-your-face with everyday wonder.

I didn't realise myself, until I saw them play live. Debut album *Heartcore* was a pretty but vaporous collection of rhythmic folk-blues with touches of electronica, but it was an afternoon show at a Norwegian jazz festival – a set which, in retrospect, showcased many of *The Snake*'s best tracks – that brought home Werliin and Wallentin's skills as improvisers and songwriters and the fierceness of their intent. Wallentin moaned and hollered with her whole small, wiry self, the way jazz singers aren't ashamed to, and attacked a floor tom during 'Today/Tomorrow' like she was in a Boredoms drum ensemble, stack heels thumping on the stage, while Werliin's loose but detailed percussion seemed to form melodies of its own in its responsiveness to every song. When he took the mic for one shy vocal of his own, one could sense the musical and personal balancing act between the couple – the exchanges of trust and fear and revelation that keep all relationships alive. Paradoxically, this attractive, talented, trained couple with their clever songs seemed suddenly more unmasked and transporting than a million delay-pedalled Animal Collective-fan primitivists.

Wildbirds' exploitation of their minimal set-up is one of their most bracing qualities, yet the band's next London appearance, as part of art collective NOMAD's Ritual For Elephant & Castle on June 5th, will involve numerous percussionists. "Just think about it," Mariam enthuses. "A big space, drums beating up the energy, arranging it with a lot of dynamics and space... it's just such an exciting thing to try out." Yet however euphoric the rhythmic pile-up gets, you somehow feel that all ears will still be drawn to the eye of the storm, to the core where two minds meet, and where the real work is done.

### Can you tell me a bit about the new album, and how it developed?

Mariam: "Some of the songs on *The Snake* were already written and played live before going into the studio, others were more like fragments, lyrics and melodies with a strong idea of where to go next. We recorded it in December last year. We tried to have as many live takes as possible to have the energy going, and then added on the necessary things as the last step."

Andreas: "We always work on new music when we tour and things pop up and we collect them, in a way. The big difference between the first and second albums was the recording process, which was much more concentrated on this one. We recorded everything in six days. A lot of songs weren't done when we entered the studio, but we brought a playground of sounds and different instruments with us – we were trying out new stuff and instruments that we hadn't used before."

### What instruments were those?

Mariam: "The instruments I'm mostly in control of are the steel drum, the santor, the gu zung and the zither. The zither has been there from the start, I love the rough way you can use it with both hitting and stroking the strings. The santor is a Persian instrument that I borrowed from my uncle. It has a string that you hit with tiny clubs that make a very delicate and soft airy sound, as in, for example 'So Soft So Pink'. I bought the gu zung in China. It's also a string instrument but with thick strings that you can bend and make more bluesy sounds with. You can hear it best on the song 'Who Ho Ho Ho'."

"With all those string instruments, I also wanted something to hit harder on, so I borrowed my aunt's steel drum, and fell in love with it – I love the sound and material and shape – and two months ago I got my own one. There's just one guy in Sweden who can tune it, though, so I hope it will cope with all our travels!"

### What music were you listening to while you were recording *The Snake*, and how did it inspire your own work?

Andreas: "We listened to Earth, who also have this pure and simple way of playing their music, but it's very strong at the same time, very few notes and slow, slow tempos. I think that's a very inspiring way to play. That was one inspiration. Nina Simone has always been present in our music: the way she performs and writes about big subjects with this tender touch."

Mariam: "A couple of weeks before recording we listened to Korean classical drumming, My Bloody Valentine and Arvo Pärt's choir pieces, but I think in the end we enjoyed the silence more for the preparation."

### Did a lot of the songs develop from improvisation? What does improvisation mean for you, and how is your background in it relevant to writing more structured songs in Wildbirds & Peacedrums?

Mariam: "For us there are always improvised parts when creating a song. In the end we feel like we do 'normal' songs, but with a bit more space in them, and because of the space we can go off from the melodies a bit, improvising around the themes live. Putting emotions in the music is improvising because you almost never feel the same things on stage... I've always loved improvising, using my voice freely. It's about being in control but at the same time losing it."

### Going back to the beginnings of the band, did you ever want to add more people around the core of drums and vocals?

Andreas: "We did the opposite, because we started off in bigger bands, and then it became fewer and fewer people. We were a trio before, with a bass, drums and voice, but in the end it turned out to be just the two of us. It was easier than most other ways to create music, with no boundaries or no expectation of what it's supposed to sound like. It's the easiest way to create the music we like."

### Is playing in such a minimal set-up ever frightening?

Mariam: "Sometimes it can be a bit scary, if I'm having a bad day or feel sensitive. But it has always felt so natural playing with Andreas this way. Music is pointless if you don't take risks with it, challenging normal life."

### You both come from formal musical backgrounds, and met while studying at the Gothenburg Academy of Music and Drama. What was the most important thing you gained from studying music in that way?

Mariam: "Getting control over my voice. Learning that that my voice is like a little animal that lives in my body and that I need to take care of the house as well as the pet. Learning how to breathe."

Andreas: "The time, that's the thing: you have a lot of time to think and practice and to work. That's a great investment for the future. But still, when you graduate you have to be strong and not fall into the shadows of history... The funny thing is that all the authorities and teachers that we decided to go against, those were the ones who like [our] music the most. It's interesting that when you finally find your way to play music and you think it's a protest, that's the music that works the best."

### Mariam, what inspires your lyrics? Do you discuss the lyrics with Andreas or are they personal to you?

Mariam: "I'm inspired by movement, attraction, destiny and faith, all the things I feel. Remembering my childhood, all the sadness that can fill a body and how to make it come out, trying to transform it to comfort. Andreas and I sometimes discuss lyrics that we feel differently about, so we aim towards the same core in the song, but there is no need to explain your lyrics to another person: people should feel them as they feel them."

### What's been your most memorable live performance to date?

Andreas: "We played at this small festival outside of Berlin, by a lake. We hadn't done a festival before, and it just ended up in a big mayhem with the audience. They pulled the power after a while. A lot of people came up on stage and I don't know how long we played, but it was a strong moment."

Mariam: "That was great! It was in the middle of the night at an outdoor festival, and we played the last slot. People were happy and dancing, and it just became natural to let everybody join in at the end, drumming and singing and having a big party together."

### I guess in a way you'll be recreating that atmosphere in your performance at the Ritual gig at the Coronet. What's the plan?

Mariam: "We will play a great powerful set of some of our drums and vocal songs, and arrange the piece for that special setting, expand it and make our normal sound much bigger. We'll invite around fifteen drummers/percussionists."

### Do you have an interest in ritual music?

Mariam: "Absolutely. But for me all music and concerts can be seen as rituals, defending the space that isn't ordinary life."

**The Quietus**  
May 2009  
Frances Morgan



**Hunting to Drums**  
Rolling across North America seems natural for a band called Wildbirds and Peacedrums. Whether their raucous Swedish two-piece live show equates to indigenous hospitality though is less certain. Nicole Farrell runs the band off the road to pop the questions. **Label Leaf**

**Bearded**  
12 April 2009  
Nicole Farrell

With a band name like Wildbirds and Peacedrums, you'd expect Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin to be a bit difficult to get a hold of. And you'd be right. These high-flying, neo-pagan Swedes are currently touring across the States and Europe: this means much frantic email correspondence and number exchange before even a word can be swapped. Luckily enough, we did catch them – though sadly only one half of the husband-and-wife couple, Andreas, could make it to the line. Better one wild bird in the hand than two in the bus, we say.

It was near midnight our end, and Andreas was driving the tour bus down some never-ending highway towards their next gig in LA. Two minutes into our crackly conversation, there came the very American and very terrifying blare of a truck's air horn. Then silence on the line. Oh dear God.

He had pulled over to the side of the road in a daredevil Scandi-European way. There were no crashes. But when Andreas offered to wake Mariam, we didn't have the heart to disturb the peace any further...

"The US tour has been fun, it's been great, touring with Lykke Li. Great set up, great people, really big shows – bigger than last time." Andreas is upbeat and surprisingly zen for an experimental percussionist. But it sounds like the free spirited pair aren't having too crazy a time in the States. So far, the highlight has been visiting a diner that featured in some nineties TV show.

"We went to Twin Peaks, the city where they recorded the show," Andreas enthuses. "And we went to Twede's Café. That was a very big moment for us!" Andreas sounds genuinely pleased here. "But usually you know, there's not so much time for sight-seeing. You just get up and drive to the venue..."

Apparently, touring the States is heavy going. Distances are so great that Mariam and Andreas find themselves driving for twelve hours at a time. For most people, being cooped up in a bus with the same person day after day would be a kind of torture. But this is a couple who have lived in each other's pockets since their student days at the Gothenburg School of Music and Drama. That they are married to one another isn't saying enough: this pair jams their scuzzy blues hand in hand. They share obscure instruments like the citra and autoharp, and something called a gu zheng... They record, perform and tour in tandem. They do absolutely everything. Together.

"For me and Mariam, as individuals, the music has always been the first choice. Since we were kids, you know." Andreas says, a smile in his voice. "So now touring and recording together, it's just natural. And our marriage? We balance it quite well. It's weird but it's working!"

This oddly happy pairing is very evident in the music of Wildbirds and Peacedrums. There's a natural, soulful easiness to their records, even in moments of intensity. Nothing sounds out of place. There's a feeling that all parts are part of a whole, from Mariam's evocative vocals to the rhythmic, tribal feel of Andreas' drums. Unsurprisingly, they say their earthy, spiritual sound came about organically: "From the beginning, it really just happened. We tried to find a forum for playing music together that wasn't confined to type or genre. We weren't supposed to end up in a band or be recorded or anything like that!"

But a band they became and recorded they were – and good thing too. Their last album, *Heartcore*, was a critical success, winning admiration far and wide. It even placed in many top ten albums of the year countdowns. But Andreas says new album *The Snake* is a very different proposition: "We recorded the first album ourselves. We were a really new band and we hadn't tried so much stuff. With the new record, it's a bigger sound: we tried to capture a kind of live expression on the record, so it's much more explosive and more complex."

Performing live is the lifeblood of this band. They enjoy being in the studio and recording, but it's nothing compared to jamming onstage. "Somehow, the real energy comes when you're in front of people," Andreas explains, "and you don't think so much about the result."

Live or recorded, the results are pretty astounding. The songs deal with what Andreas calls "the big questions in life": family, belonging and longing. They recorded the album in just six days. Andreas says they just needed to put out something new: "We need a new record as much as our fans!" Andreas laughs. "We're really very excited about the release."

Sound-wise, the new record takes low-key improv to the max, then smoothes it down with sweetness. They didn't self-produce this record in the same way they did the last, but Andreas says they always keep a handle on their music: "It's really important we have control over the result, even if we have people producing it and mastering it. We have to get the sound right."

Quite fittingly, it was at this stage the sound on our call started to go funny. We apologised for the bad line. We heard Andreas' reply, just before the fuzz drowned him out: "It's not a red line, it's a pink one!" We're not exactly sure what he means. But there's one thing we do know: these Wildbirds and Peacedrums are on a bus that's going places.

**Photography** Courtesy of Leaf





## Unclassifiable charm

### mirrors of nature

Words: Tom Howard

Photography: Brian Wotnot

### Wildbirds And Peacedrums

The Social, London

"We haven't got much time. So we're going to play a short, but hopefully intense, set." And with that, Mariam Wallentin, half of Sweden's Wildbirds And Peacedrums, unleashes herself. Her partner, Andreas Werliin sits barefoot behind his drum kit. The bare feet, he says, help him keep time. Shoes make him late.

They're a satisfyingly organic band, using other instruments – steel drum, sitar – sparsely, and as extensions of themselves. Nothing is plugged in. Wallentin has a microphone, of course, but her time is shared between bouncing like one possessed and adding colour to Werliin's earthiness.

The dress Wallentin's wearing looks like snakeskin, a possible nod to their new and

second record, *The Snake*. Werliin's tight white T-shirt is emblazoned with the menu from the DVD projection that's on a screen behind him.

I have no idea if it's meant to be there. But the icon sits on 'play' for the whole set. As he paints his tom-tom heavy portraits, the word bounces around his torso. And he obeys it. His technique is right so he doesn't tire. And if Wildbirds sometimes sound dainty on record, live, powered forth by these drums, they sound potent, powerful.

But this isn't just Werliin's doing. Live, Wallentin sings with force, recalling PJ Harvey or Nina Simone at their most impassioned and intense. Perhaps most importantly, the volume is cranked. The vocal playfulness of 'Liar, Lion' is maximum fun, while the gentler 'Chain Of Steel' and its electronic loop are a plea for release from emotional incarceration.

It occurs to me that 'My Heart' is one of the sweetest love songs I've heard. Wallentin

repeats "I'm lost without your rhythm" to her drummer-husband and somehow doesn't sound corny. Like everything they do, it has unclassifiable charm. They are fiercely experimental in every way. It's explained in their most significant lyric from 'So Soft So Pink': "Let us not talk about the past! There is nothing to say about history." Wildbirds And Peacedrums have their own agenda and they intend to follow it.

They are simple and focused, wild and unruly, sometimes ending songs hitting whatever they can as hard as they can. That they both studied musical improvisation at the University of Gothenburg might explain their open-ended, questing spirit. But if they were ever improvised, these songs have since been carved down to a ferocious live show. It kicks me in the stomach.

The greatest trick any artist can pull is being a fresh concept. And Wildbirds And Peacedrums are pulling it hard.

## Plan B

April 2009

Tom Howard

# UNTAMED SWEDISH DUO STILL FLYING HIGH



WILDBIRDS AND PEACEDRUMS: THE SOCIAL LONDON

Words **BARNABY SMITH**  
Photo **RACHEL LIPSITZ**

**Wildbirds** And Peacedrums are such an engrossing phenomenon partly because this handsome, happily married Swedish couple sound like they've never listened to any music before in their lives, while at the same time having absorbed and been influenced by everything. Generally, this is not an act based on melody (at least, not up until the quite beautiful 'Chain Of Steel' from new album *The Snake*), which is one of the reasons their debut, *Heartcore*, was a slightly

frustrating listen for some. "See them live, you'll see," I was told, and I did, at the Concrete and Glass Festival in Shoreditch last year. It was among the most breathtaking pieces of live performance I've ever experienced. Tonight, however, isn't exactly the right setting in which to encounter Wildbirds And Peacedrums - the blur of hair and loose clothing that is Mariam Wallentin is something that needs to be seen to be believed, and a packed Social is not visibility's friend.

While Mariam didn't lose herself to the degree that she might do on other more intense nights, she thrashed away on steel drum and glockenspiel and impressed with a wild, passionate and un-self-conscious stage presence.

Andreas Werliin, on the other hand, assumed a more staid role. You could call him the duo's metronome, except the rhythms and patterns he drew from his kit were anything but metronomic, shot through instead with afro-beat phrasing and avant-garde jazz. The most interesting thing about them at this point in their still-budding career is that Wildbirds And Peacedrums are able to transpose the same feeling of raw abandon that they achieve live - which seems infused with a distinctly child-like energy - on to record.

The vocal style of Mariam, meanwhile, proves that there is something extremely bluesy about the band, to the extent that an

odious comparison could be made with Jeff Buckley's *Live At Sin-A* album. A tenuous link perhaps, but such is the musical curiosity shown by these two that they surely wouldn't mind that much.

This brief show was meant to showcase songs from *The Snake*, and according to the set-list that's what the band did. But what with the lengthy improvisation and gleeful spontaneity that Wildbirds And Peacedrums inject into every unique performance, it's doubtful whether they actually rendered the set-list entirely faithfully. Management must be tearing their hair out with rage, but this duo's fans tear their hair out with ecstasy.

**The Stool Pigeon**  
April 2009  
Barnaby Smith



PHOTO: JONATHAN LEJONHUFVUD

## Wildbirds And Peacedrums

### The Snake

(The Leaf Label)

Wildbirds And Peacedrums, made up of wife and husband team Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin, say that their new album, 'The Snake', is so named because it deals with darker issues than its predecessor, the band's first album, 'Heartcore'. Ostensibly, this is not noticeable. In fact much of it, like 'So Soft So Pink', seems readily likeable and easy on the ear.

However, dig deeper and you will find exactly what they are talking about. There is No

Light', for instance, recall's the visceral poundings of parts of 'Heartcore'. Made up, as much of Wildbirds and Peacedrums' music is, of a pared down and primal brew of drums and vocals (on their own), it summons up deep-seated urges and insecurities in its incantations.

'Chain of Steel', also, concerns itself with less than positive matters, dealing as it does with paranoia and conflict: "She's got a hold on me... in a nasty way." (It should be noted, in addition, that both albums are on one of the few *genuinely* independent labels: Leaf.)

As a function of the band's

minimal approach, the resulting effect is forceful. There is an inevitable ferocity to it. But what makes Wildbirds And Peacedrums so distinctive (apart from Wallentin's remarkable voice) is that this element is juxtaposed with a kind of jazzy freedom. On 'Places' this is given free-reign, while at the same time confining itself within predefined parameters (a vocal refrain, a steady beat). And then they go and shock us with a change of direction, mid-song: a thrashing percussive coda.

Let's hope this band continues to surprise for a very long time.

**Richard Davis**  
Out 13 April

**Artrock**

May 2009

Richard Davis

## The Hit List Metro Life's Pick Of Screen, Sound And Print



► **MUSIC: Wildbirds & Peacedrums: The Snake**  
Funked-up folk and bare-bones blues from this Swedish husband and wife team who pair Mariam Wallentin's Kate Bush-style vocals with Andreas Werliin's one-man junkyard rhythm section on an album full of gloriously odd shaman pop.



### Wildbirds And Peacedrums: The Snake

Leaf ★★★★★☆

Swedish husband and wife duo Wildbirds And Peacedrums build on their cult hit debut *Heartcore*'s voodoo cocktail of bare-bones blues and off-kilter pop on this follow-up. The vocal swoops and coos of Mariam Wallentin – who sounds like Kate Bush mixed with The Slits – are impeccably partnered by her seemingly triple-jointed husband Andreas Werliin, a one-man junkyard rhythm section who splices minimalist snare drums, xylophones and zithers into dizzying, semi-shamanistic configurations. On *There Is No Light*, he sets Wallentin's scat jazz yelps to a predatory rumble of funk-pummelled drums. Despite the surface impression that the pair are whooping it up by the campfire after too much acid, there are moments of songwriting brilliance here.

Claire Allfree

## Metro

6 April 2009  
Claire Allfree



### WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

*The Snake* (Leaf)

When Wildbirds & Peacedrums popped up last year, I decided to give them a miss. "Swedish husband and wife – Mariam

Wallentin singing, Andreas Werliin on drums – make experimental soul music," the reviewers said, and I decided they weren't for me. They sounded far too quirky. It turns out that was a BIG mistake. This is wonderful stuff. Every song is playful and inventive, and there's a couple of tunes – *My Heart* and *So Soft So Pink* – that'll make you think Mariam should be ranked up there with the soul singers of old. AM

## Flux

April 2009  
Alex Marshall

### WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

The Snake

4.5

THE music scene is littered with post-White Stripes man/woman duos. Here's probably the most original and best. From Sweden (where else?), they boast the incredible range of singer Mariam Wallentin, whose voice goes from ethereal to powerhouse, calling at many points in between, with yelps and shouts.

Husband Andreas Werliin is a percussionist par excellence, adding earthy tribal beats to stand-outs like the clattering *There Is No Light*. Like The Snake of the album title, he carries a venomous bite.

Shafts of liquid, melodic beauty appear like the sun from behind a storm cloud to give texture to one of the most attention-grabbing albums of the year.

SC



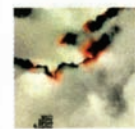
## The Sun

10 April 2009  
Simon Cosyns

### WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

THE SNAKE (THE LEAF)

7



Gothenburg's finest drum'n'voice duo set the bar pretty high with their critically-bummed debut *'Heartcore'*, but according to the blurb surrounding this follow-up they're feeling no pressure. In fact Mariam Wallentin (the wild bird) and husband Andreas Werliin (he of the peace drums) talk of "intuition", their zodiac signs and "deconstructing their roles" as impetus for *'The Snake'*. Music theory waffle/spiritual musings aside, this sees the pair expand their austere template with new instruments and ideas to great effect. While the likes of *'Places'* stay true to the stripped-back sound of old, everything from kalimbas to autoharps and steel drums drag the W&P sound into territories unknown. And when the guzheng starts up, it all kicks off. **Tim Chester**  
DOWNLOAD: *'So Soft So Pink'*

## NME

11 April 2009  
Tim Chester

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

### *The Snake*

Leaf CD

There's not a lot of guesswork with an outfit like Wildbirds & Peacedrums, whose name neatly underscores their ritualistic, animistic sway. Still, the Swedish duo handily step beyond garden-variety freak folk on their second album. Venturing further into the territory explored on their debut, *Heartcore*, *The Snake* touches variously upon Cat Power, White Magic and even The Knife, with subtle electronic treatments fleshing out skeletal arrangements of percussion and stringed instruments. The most immediate reference point might be PJ Harvey, whose muscular, mercurial style clearly informs singer Mariam Wallentin's powerful and versatile delivery. Melodically speaking, the songs are often all but a cappella – at least three are made with nothing but drums and voice, with the others subtly coloured by vibraphones and autoharp. "There Is No Light" is a fearsome duel between a chanting Wallentin and her partner (and husband), percussionist Andreas Werliin, who explodes his drum kit into a rigid, eighth note array of cymbal splash and punctuating toms.

With its cycling vibraphone arpeggios and bass counterpoint, "Chain Of Steel" suggests the album's more melodic extreme; easing off, Wallentin recalls Kate Bush, but something in her variously warbling, bellowing, cooing style also suggests Appalachia's pious primitivists of a century ago. But Wildbirds & Peacedrums' minimalist approach never fetishises folkiness. Indeed, it's the directness of their songs – drums miked loud and deep, Wallentin's voice sometimes subtly multitracked but spared any obvious processing – that makes them so strikingly strange. It feels unusual to be confronted so directly by such naked elements in such a profoundly musical fashion; for all their tribalism, they're hardly immune to the pleasures of pop, as the graceful "Liar Lion" will immediately attest.

Philip Sherburne

**The Wire**  
May 2009  
Philip Sherburne



**Mojo**  
May 2009  
Mike Barnes

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

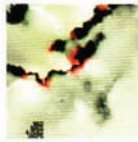
★★★★

### The Snake LEAF

Second album by Swedish husband-wife, percussion-vocals duo.

Unsurprisingly, vocal and drums duos have never really made it as a standard rock format, The Creatures excepted: you've got to have something pretty exceptional going on for it to work. Wildbirds & Peacedrums do, and they have expanded their instrumentation slightly since their debut, *Heartcore*, with tuned percussion and keyboards. The duo's songs may employ no chords and few notes to sing against, but they are brilliantly structured via Andreas Werliin's melodic drum patterns, with Mariam Wallentin's flamboyant, unfettered voice a huge presence. On *My Heart* she sings, "I'm lost without your rhythm," although she is immersed in it fully. There's some pretty wild stuff too. Werliin drums up some rolling thunder on *Great Lines*, while *There Is No Light* sounds like some Arctic Circle shamanic mushroom ritual freakout.

Mike Barnes



## WILDBIRDS AND PEACEDRUMS THE SNAKE

LEAF

Singer Mariam Wallentin and her husband/drummer Andreas Werliin brilliantly augment their sparse sound (often just drums and vocals) here, adding percussion that seems to come from nowhere, just as their melodies sound like nothing else, taking jazz, folk and pop influences and combining them to make a truly unique noise. When 'So Soft So Pink' ends with an almost medieval loop and gives way to the thrilling thump of 'Places', one can't help but marvel at the sheer originality and confidence on show. Wallentin's vocal range is stunning – at times as moody and haunting as Beth Gibbons but snapping in a moment into an unearthly yelp. The beautiful 'My Heart' ("I'm lost without your rhythms!") is the best advert for married life I've ever heard. I have a sneaking suspicion that they're actively taking the piss out of The Ting Tings in 'Liar Lion's "ha ha, hee hee" refrain, which is pretty funny if you ask me. *Niall Harden*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

DOWNLOAD: 'CHAIN OF STEEL', 'GREAT LINES'.  
FOR FANS OF: ANIMAL COLLECTIVE, PJ HARVEY.

AU

May 2009

Niall Harden

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

THE SNAKE

THE LEAF

★★★★★



### ■ GIVEN THAT THEY ARE A

husband-and-wife duo with a strictly limited instrumental palette, Gothenburg's Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin couldn't be less like The White Stripes. Employing

little more than Werliin's basic, tribal drums and Wallentin's pagan whoops and hollers, they sound more like Bat For Lashes at her wildest. Somehow nothing appears to be missing from the tantalisingly brief beats and blues of There Is No Light, while Chain Of Steel's tick-tocking marimba adds spooky variation. Best of all is seven-minute closer My Heart, whose gospel finale is an overpowering feast after such remarkable famine. ■ DAVID SMYTH

DOWNLOAD: My Heart

Q

May 2009

David Smyth

## Wildbirds And Peacedrums

The Snake (Leaf)

The follow-up to last year's bracing debut, *Heartcore*, sees Swedish couple Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin embellish their heady drums'n'vocals soul with flourishes of marimba, piano and xylophone. A shared preference for spontaneity above perfection unites the two (Wallentin previously studied vocal improvisation) and *The Snake* goes some way toward capturing the exhilarating fervour of their live performances. This is a jarring, confrontational record. Their energy is almost exhausting, and they revel in the fiery clockwork intensity of 'Places'. But they possess, too, a contrasting capacity for sweet and affecting balladry (the spiritual lament 'So Soft So Pink'), and 'My Heart' traverses from measured cogitation to a joyous finale.

James Skinner

Plan B

April 2009

James Skinner

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

★★★★★

The Snake The Leaf Label



The drum is everything, as forgotten '80s band Carmel had it. And millennia ago, it quite literally was. When man was

short, hairy and protrusive of brow, he seized a discarded animal bone and spontaneously banged it on a rock, savouring the dull thud while also inventing the drumstick.

With increasing frequency, avant-pop acts – from Animal Collective through Fuck Buttons to Yeasayer – have been successfully exploiting music's percussive tribalism to produce records that are satisfyingly earthy and full of spiritual uplift. Among them is Swedish duo W&P, whose second LP might best be described as primitivist soul-pop. The married couple use percussion to connect with the collective unconscious while pushing at its conceptual parameters and – by tapping Celtic/Nordic folk, Gregorian chant, black spirituals and raw blues, and applying Björk- and Kate Bush-like twists – they've produced a thing of funkily pagan beauty. *Sharon O'Connell*

Time Out

April 9-15 2009

Sharon O'Connell



## Wildbirds & Peacedrums *The Snake*

[Leaf; 2009]

8.3

Find it at: [Insound](#) | [eMusic](#) | [Lala](#)

[✉ EMAIL LINK](#)

It's only been a year since Wildbirds & Peacedrums released their debut album, *Heartcore*, and were praised for their application of deceptively simple techniques to create highly complex and agile pop music. The Swedish duo, comprising vocalist Mariam Wallentin and her husband, percussionist Andreas Werliin, have taken this unadorned method to a remarkable level on their follow up album, *The Snake*. *Heartcore* may have shone with clarity and technical artfulness, but in the passing year Wildbirds & Peacedrums have honed their skills to such a fine degree that their distinctive sound is now fully realized and acutely powerful.

*The Snake* is a considerably darker album compared to the tender playfulness of their debut, and this smoky sultriness suits the music well. Just as the number of cuts on a diamond determine its brightness, Wildbirds & Peacedrums seem to have absorbed a huge range of musical resources-- from American primitive to jazz to Björkesque experimentalism and even Mongolian throat singing-- and mined them carefully before whittling down the essentials and fashioning 10 beautifully imaginative, contemplative songs.

*The Snake* comes alive through its imagery, which provides the life source for the instrumentation to be structured around. The opening track, "Island", recalls the journey of a solitary man who swims to Iceland under a canopy of rainbows, and on "Chain of Steel", Wallentin struggles to free herself from the emotional clutches of a female foe. All this deft wordplay makes for some fantastic lyrics, but the real magic lies in their execution. Wallentin hops and skips across her vocal landscape with full control and arresting finesse, demanding that you listen intently to her abstract storytelling. On a track such as "So Soft So Pink" she travels between vocal styles fluidly, from the aforementioned throat singing that blends in with the springy rasp of a Jew's harp before sliding in to soaring, ethereal melodies as she constantly alters her technique to enable the song to expand. It's barely six minutes long, but it feels epic. The way her soulful vocals maneuver across Werliin's percussive background recalls the dark beauty of Nina Simone's "Be My Husband" or Odetta's "Another Man Done Gone", which are all the more compelling for the warmth and passion that knot around the skeletal simplicity of the music. Werliin's sharpness and dexterity is the key to making this work: His rhythmic sophistication is the group's vital glue, and each member depends on the other to reach their full potential. As Wallentin sings on the final track, "My Heart", "I'm lost without your rhythm."

Despite their strong pop leanings, it's not surprising that Wildbirds & Peacedrums were awarded Swedish Jazz Act of the Year in 2008. Their equipment may be largely restricted to percussion, vocals, and the occasional embellishment of keyboard, but their ability to fully eclipse these limitations and create music with a strong improvisational pulse and so much vitality is a no small feat, and proves that they are continuing to experiment in magnificent, dynamic ways.

— Mia Clarke, May 5, 2009

**Pitchfork**  
5 May 2009  
Mia Clarke

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums: *The Snake*

by Luke Slater

73 comments 10:07 May 13th, 2009

Artists: Wildbirds & Peacedrums

Label: Leaf

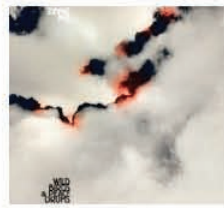
Just a year has passed since the release of *Heartcore* but with *The Snake*, Swedish duo **Wildbirds & Peacedrums** have already honed their sound beyond that debut. Upon cursory research the point is reached where you think "what the fuck, there's TWO of them?". Even knowing this, it's still hard to fathom. It's equally surprising to find out they're also married to each other but, despite the matrimonial unity, there's a stark separation between the constituent parts. Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin share a direction, naturally, but it's akin to two trains on parallel tracks heading to the same station, rather than two carriages of the same train. Each part does its own thing. The dual focus means a situation is created where both co-exist in the foreground and background.

*The Snake* is characteristic Wildbirds & Peacedrums – just the bare bones. With such sparseness, it's hard to attribute any real influences or discernible contemporaries. Trying to imagine a sometimes soulful, often haunting, Scandinavian femme doing her best to move between several octaves, mixed up with ultimately necessary but mostly understated drumming – the heartbeat. Then sprinkle with erratic, infrequent and unexpected percussive strikes, passages and plays from glocks, marimba, steel drums and wood-blocks. The final additions may portray a chaotic bent, but they are mere embellishments to the twin peaks of drums and vocals.

At her most tame, the comparison to Nina Simone still rings true for Wallentin. At her wildest, she is nobody but herself. Her words worm, wriggle and wrap their way around the accompaniment throughout the ten tracks. "There is no light, there is no light/my eyelids ache from too much..." mumbles Wallentin before blurting out a vocal line almost cribbed from Blueboy's 1997 UK hit single '**Remember Me**'. Again, everything writhes around the central point, like a tornado picking up dust, people, livestock and shrubbery in its wake. Tribal it certainly is.

It seems like an exercise in experimentation, but not wantonly so, or even particularly noticeably so. Elements of folkish, occasionally almost ambient Americana are there, but there's certainly no coherent theme or thread. It switches from a saunter to stroll as quickly as from ponderous to perky. The difference between 'Who HoHo Ho' and the following 'My Heart' is ample evidence. In the former, jingly stuff jingles, wobbly stuff wobbles and bendy stuff bends and plays out atop a vocal duet pulling all together in some kind of early-day-dawning dream sequence. In the latter the Wallentin returns the melody to us, while Werliin brings the beats back, and for a brief while we are transported from minor-key bleakness to steel-drum gaiety. It even seems to switch between centuries – 'Great Lines' is as Gregorian Chant-esque a song as you're likely to hear this side of the odd obscure Norwegian dark metal experimentalists.

These Swedes seem to pick anything up and play it. They'd probably even make beautiful music out of garden furniture. The giddy ride through tonal ups and downs, timbre switches, key changes can almost be too much to take, and if Wildbirds & Peacedrums were more than a duet, it almost certainly would feel excessive. Negotiating *The Snake* for the first time is a journey riddled with surprise – that almost nothing can be nailed down or predicted even after the seven-minutes-thirty of closer of 'My Heart' is pure 'lucky dip' stuff. Each time you dip in, you seem to come out with an even bigger handful of sweetness.



TYPE:  
Album

RELEASE DATE:  
20/04/2009

Wildbirds & Peacedrums

8 / 10

**Drowned in Sound**  
May 2009  
Luke Slater



## Dusted Reviews

Artist: Wildbirds & Peacedrums

Album: The Snake

Label: Leaf

Review date: Apr. 13, 2009



Wildbirds & Peacedrums - "My Heart" (The Snake)

Last year's *Heartcore* introduced Wildbirds & Peacedrums to the world, earning the Swedish duo plenty of plaudits and praise, but it revealed only a portion of the band's appeal. Vocalist Mariam Wallentin and percussionist Andreas Werliin didn't get truly wild on their debut — you had to catch a live show to see them ruffle their feathers. Werliin's percussion had a tribal energy reminiscent of the Burundi beat of Adam & the Ants or Bow Wow Wow. Wallentin's elastic voice soared and swooped, displaying freedom and flexibility combined with the ability to convey great emotion.

*Heartcore*'s songs had the catchiness of classic pop, with plenty of great hooks, but the performances were loose and edgy with a sense of exploration and improvisation about them. When asked to describe their own music in three words, they chose "free, raw and powerful," and that's pretty spot on. It was no surprise to learn that the duo had won the Jazz In Sweden 2008 prize.

A year on, they have now tackled the task of delivering on their promise. *The Snake* displays many of its predecessor's strengths — good songs, that emotion-laden voice, the amorphous blend of pop and jazz — without trying to be an action replay. Although Werliin's trademark percussion propels tracks such as "Great Lines" and "Today/Tomorrow," elsewhere the duo is more subdued. "Island," begins with a subtle vocal drone that creates a mood rather than conveying literal meaning. Its placement as the opening track almost feels like a manifesto, a message to those expecting *Heartcore, Pt. II*. "There Is No Light" (the first single from the album) follows and acts as a total contrast, with percussion brought to the fore. The contrasts between these two tracks are typical of the album as a whole.

Another notable difference from *Heartcore* is the greater use of tuned instruments, compared to the previous predominance of voice and percussion. Here, Wallentin and Werliin both contribute to a richer soundscape, playing autoharp, harmonica, steelpan, Fender Rhodes bass, flute, xylophone — there's significantly more color and atmosphere. "So Soft, So Pink" opens with a persistent harmonica drone and wordless vocals for a distinct eastern vibe, before segueing into a less reflective mood. Such contrasts within a single piece recur throughout the album as much as the contrasts between pieces.

The finale "My Heart," with its singalong chorus and lyrics that tug at the heartstrings, is Wildbirds & Peacedrums at their most pop-tastic. Its repeated refrain, "I'm lost without your rhythm..." is given a little-girl-lost quality by the fragility of Wallentin's delivery. And who knows, the words might literally be true — it's hard to imagine Wallentin or Werliin without the other. When exploring the undefined territory between musical genres, that kind of chemistry goes a long way.

By John Eyles

Dusted  
April 2009  
John Eyles

## MUSIC REVIEWS



## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

### The Snake

(The Leaf Label)

Buy it from [Insound](#)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I saw Wildbirds & Peacedrums play a phenomenal set to a crowd of no more than twenty onlookers in Sheffield last month. Lesser bands might have pulled the plug or simply gone through the motions, but this idiosyncratic duo from Gothenburg brought the house down with a set that combined daring experimentation with soulful pop hooks. Only someone hoping for a Scandinavian Ting Tings would have been disappointed.

*The Snake* is the second album from Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin, and it sees the husband and wife team expanding their sonic palette to include instruments as diverse as steel drums, xylophones, marimbas and piano. The band received 2008's prestigious *Jazz in Sweden* award and the prize money enabled them to record *The Snake* at the legendary Svenska Grammfonstudion in Gothenburg. This was clearly an astute investment as the production is superb — Andreas Werliin's kinetic drumming has never sounded as impressive.

Lead single *There Is No Light* is a great showcase of Wildbirds & Peacedrums' talents, a shuffling rhythmic rocker with plenty of uninhibited yelps and grunts from Wallentin. Her vocal performances are likely to divide opinion, but having seen her belt out these songs in the live setting I can't help but be impressed by her expressiveness, range, and strong sense of melody. *Chain of Steel* has a more complex arrangement and the basic melodic framework is already there, but Wallentin takes the song to another level. Björk comparisons are warranted, but there are times when I'm reminded of singers as diverse as the Dirty Projectors' Dave Longstreth and Nico.

*The Snake* draws to a close with the steel drum drenched epic, *My Heart*, a delicate, slow-building love song with the gorgeous refrain of "I'm lost without your rhythm". In terms of the lyrics, the vocal performance, and even the percussion, this is arguably the album's most conventional track, but what *My Heart* lacks in terms of innovation it easily makes up for with sheer soul and power. To put it simply, it's a near perfect conclusion to one of the finest records I've heard this year.

6 May, 2009 - 12:52 — [David Coleman](#)

No Ripcord  
6 May 2009  
David Coleman

## Pop

### Wildbirds and Peacedrums Luminaire, London

★★★★★

Brushing her sweat-soaked fringe away from her eyes, Mariam Wallentin blinks at the sold-out crowd. "I'm not too talkable," the Swedish chanteuse mutters matter-of-factly. "I like to sing."

As understatement goes, it's up there with Elvis enjoying the odd burger. Wallentin breaks words down into sounds and sobs and takes possession of every utterance, before waging war on the aggressive rhythms made by her husband, Wildbirds and Peacedrums' formidable drummer, Andreas Werliin.

The duo met at Gothenberg's Academy of Music and Drama, and their debut album, *Heartcore*, was released in Sweden in 2006. Arriving on British shores last year, its blend of gothic blues, intense gospel and punk rock has been astounding listeners ever since.

Its follow-up, *The Snake*, is even more bruising and electrifying, but still doesn't match up to watching Wallentin and Werliin's animalistic courtship on stage. Holding each other's gaze, they tear into *Chain of Steel*, Wallentin stalking around the stage as if sizing up her prey, Werliin waiting and encouraging her to pounce.

Very physical performers, they play with abandon. She attacks an array of instruments, from a zither to a steel drum, stamps her feet, dances with her arms in the air and often sings without her microphone. He is a contained force of nature stuck between the delicate, nursery-rhyme melodies he entices from his glockenspiel and the thunderous roar he forces from the drums.

Wildbirds and Peacedrums' music is equally hedonistic, sweet and foreboding. *There Is No Light* has a spiritual soul and a primal beat. Wallentin's startling voice, combining Janis Joplin's strength and Judy Garland's vulnerability, propels the duo's most conventional song, the ballad *My Heart*, into unexplored realms of passion and heartbreak. *Doubt/Hope* and *Today/Tomorrow* are shamanic dance songs, slippery with furious percussion as the duo complement and compete with one another and succeed in outdoing the competition.

**Betty Clarke**



### Wild Birds & Peace Drums *There Is No Light* Leaf

★★★★★

Coming out of their corner with the gloves up, the husband and wife team of Andreas and Mariam Wallentin deliver an explosive opener to *The Snake* album campaign. Coming off like vintage Flora and Airtto with a northern European tribal jazz twist, *'There Is No Light'* rides a raucous rhythm that is reminiscent of Jimi Tenor and Edward Vesala's *City Of Women* project from back in 2000. Strong stuff indeed.

DJ  
April 2009  
Found Sounds

### Wildbirds & Peacedrums

#### *There Is No Light* Leaf single

This song marks the point in the Swedish drum-and-vocal duo's show when things start getting properly, exhilaratingly, wildly, transcendently—and, if you've come straight from work and are standing pint-less next to someone you've only just met, just a weeny bit embarrassingly—tribal. Astonishing, disturbing, beautiful stuff



The Guardian  
13 April 2009  
Betty Clarke

Time Out  
March 19-25 2009  
Bella Todd

# 9 Swedes earn their white stripes

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

Heartcore (Leaf)

£13.99 ★★★★★

Stuart Nicholson finds a couple of Scandinavians on a quest for stripped-down, pagan blues



Spare a thought for drums. They've got feelings too.

Well, according to Andreas Werliin, they have. As one half of the duo Wildbirds & Peacedrums, he's on a mission to convey pure feeling in music. And if that means wringing emotions out of a drum kit then he's up for it.

Wildbirds & Peacedrums are the ultimate in down-sized bands, a lean and mean combination of Werliin's primal rhythm and Mariam Wallentin's impassioned vocals that strip music down to its very essence. Such a combination might sound like a busking group from hell, but Wallentin's voice makes everything possible.

Her goosebump-invoking sound operates on a sliding scale between the blues roar of Janis Joplin on the one hand and the spookily evocative folk singing of Mary Margaret O'Hara on the other. Add some of her own fiery passion for

good measure, and you have a singer of deceptively wide range that can handle a heavy spiritual lament like 'I Can't Tell in His Eyes', the raw gospel feel of 'Bird' or use her driving rhythmic feel as a multi-tracked vocal choir on 'The Way Things Go'.

The two met as students at Gothenburg's Academy of Music and Drama in Sweden in 2004, and they began performing together the following year, when they also married. 'We had no musical ideals to trust or lean on, so we just had to believe in ourselves and each other,' says Werliin.

What emerged was a heady brew of pagan blues, spiritual pop and ecstatic soul music haloed by Werliin's drums and percussion effects. It sounds surprisingly uncluttered, their less-is-more ethic giving the illusion of a fuller sound.

'I don't need to cover up Miriam's voice with a lot of other stuff,' Werliin adds. 'I can just play a simple rhythm and rely on the space/silence. We keep a lot of space in the recordings and somehow it seems people fill in the rest themselves – a jazzier hears horns and basslines and a punk hears smashed guitars!'

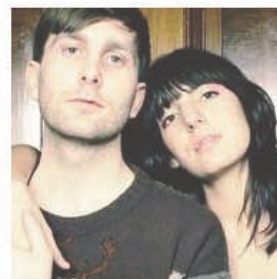
Although the absence of keyboard players, bass players, horn players and backing vocalists may seem a bit extreme, at least it has enabled Wildbirds & Peacedrums to find a direct line into musical intensity and heartfelt expression, which makes it something to be treasured.

**DOWNLOAD** 'The Way Things Go'; 'I Can't Tell in His Eyes'

## DiScover: Wildbirds & Peacedrums

4 votes

by James Skinner



Artists: Wildbirds & Peacedrums

Rewind roughly three months and you'll find this scribe in an old warehouse by Oslo's riverside; stood next to the stage in anticipation of Lykke Li's first performance at the city's by:Larm festival. Before said artist appears however, it's the turn of a young married couple also from Sweden. Jaws are dropped, eyes are trained resolutely on the stage and the reception is rapturous. To quote (ahem), myself: 'It's hard to believe the majesty and racket emanating from the stage is the work of but two musicians, such is the impact they have.'

The couple in question: Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin, otherwise known as Wildbirds & Peacedrums. In *Heartcore* (review) they've delivered a striking debut album – our DiScovery of last month, in fact – that offers its listeners a sound both primal and graceful; more-so – an amalgamation of influences collated into a daring, original whole that should by rights see the duo heralded in end-of-year lists and beyond.

On an unassuming Thursday evening I caught up with the pair at London's Scala bar, where they sit first on a bill also featuring Born Ruffians and Caribou. Wonderfully – uniquely, it would seem – everything is running ahead of schedule, and as we sneak upstairs the band are more than happy to fill me in on their history, their confusion at being labelled an electronica outfit, and what, exactly, a 'viber' is...

**So you met at Gothenburg's Academy of Music and Drama, where you both studied. How was that?**

**Andreas Werliin:** Well, the course had a lot of different things going on, but it didn't support your own creativity as much as we wanted. So there was a lot of frustration – we talked a lot and had all these teachers to try and impress, but also all these friends we wanted to play with too. It was difficult!

**Mariam Wallentin:** I mean, university can be a really good thing – there's a lot of knowledge there, and you learn from the tradition of the place, but when you feel like you've had everything you wanted... I just felt like I got stuck there. I think all musicians are in some way striving to get back to the core, you know – of yourself – which was there when you first started making music, in an impulse or the excitement of something new... and I just lost that. And in one way, while you can never create anything entirely new 'cause everything's already been done, there are still ways to recapture that feeling. It's hard to explain...

**And so you formed the band around that time?**

**MW:** Yeah... a year later or so.

**AW:** First we got together.

**MW:** ...after hanging out and playing in different bands and settings...

**I was curious as to what the first Wildbirds & Peacedrums show was like...**

**MW:** I think – I think the first show was actually at the film festival...?

**AW:** Yeah, we started really small –

**MW:** We're still small! We have a lot of friends in Gothenburg all playing music, so it's normal to just play around and jam. And then after rehearsing with other bands we'd stay and play some more, and we found some freedom in that, 'cause we knew each other so well and it felt really good. So then we had this friend arranging a film festival outside of Gothenburg and he was like, 'Well, you can come and play there?' – as we'd mentioned to him that we'd been playing together. So we went there and played in a barn, Andreas forgot his drumsticks – it was really clichéd actually – we had to go out and make some! And I think starting out that way helped us realise that we can go on and make music without that much instrumentation. You know – sometimes stuff breaks and drumsticks fall a part, but we can survive that, and there's no need to rely on electronics or anything like that...

**That certainly shines through when you play live! I would say that your music, by its very nature I suppose, is difficult to classify. It's a tricky question, but what would you say has shaped the band in terms of influences?**

**MW:** We've been listening to so much lately, and we both listen to a lot of different stuff, different music, so maybe that shows...

**AW:** On one side, we listen to and love songs, you know? Like, just simple, good songs. It could be anything from –

## Drowned in Sound

29 May 2008

James Skinner



Observer Music Monthly

20 April 2008

Stuart Nicholson

# GOTHENBURG SUPER-DUO WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS REJECT MUSIC COLLEGE, GO HEARTCORE INSTEAD

By **ANDREW FENWICK**  
Photo **RACHEL LIPSITZ**

**“I KNEW THAT THERE WAS MUCH MORE** to come out of the drum kit than the usual sounds you hear bands churning out everyday,” says Andreas Werliin, explaining the dynamic rhythmic palette that colours Wildbirds & Peacedrums heavily expressive, percussion-driven music.

With songwriter and vocalist wife Mariam Wallentin, the Swedish duo have forged an extraordinary hybrid of left-leaning pop and swampy blues that seesaws between pagan rhythms and bewitching balladry. It’s no overstatement to say their self-produced debut, *Heartcore*, is something of a minor masterpiece.

The couple met four years ago at Gothenburg’s Academy of Music and Drama, where Werliin studied percussion and Wallentin vocal improv. But they quickly grew frustrated at the institution’s strictures. “I ended up getting really mad with the way music was made there,” says Werliin. “It was just so rigid and left no room for creativity at all.”

Born of a desire to break down and then reconstruct music in a more impassioned manner, the pair admit to making the majority of their music up as they go along. “We’ve never had any formula, so it’s always been a case of

just believing in each other,” continues Wallentin. “It works out, though; we’ve never felt any weight of expectation on our shoulders.”

Having never recorded before, Werliin and Wallentin were forced to keep the recording of *Heartcore* as primitive as possible, using just drums and live vocals. “We’ve played a lot of gigs, so we tried to rely on the energy we create on stage,” says Werliin. “It was so hard to know what the result was going to be like because we had no references; we just stuck with the goal of trying to capture a sound that was as honest as possible.”

With a fiery passion and magnetic stage presence, Wallentin’s uninhibited vocals perfectly accompany Werliin’s innovative rhythms. “I’ve been really inspired by artists including Nina Simone, Joni, Sarah Vaughan and that old guard of queens,” says Wallentin. “Recently I’ve been listening to a lot of improv vocalists and African choirs – basically people with deep, dark voices.”

The pair’s songs effortlessly flit from wistful laments, as on ‘I Can’t Tell In His Eyes’, to crashing crescendos, as on album highlight, ‘Doubt/Hope’. Wildbirds & Peacedrums: proof, then, that emotional depth, when given the space to breathe, is most definitely a beautiful thing.



Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin, aka Robin & Hood

**The Stool Pigeon**  
Spring 2008  
Andrew Fenwick

# REVIEW 2008

## Rock and pop albums

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### 9. Wildbirds And Peacedrum

**Heartcore** *The Leaf Label*

Leftfield, folk-pop twosome for fans of Feist, Fiery Furnaces and flipping good music generally.

**Time Out - Top 10 Rock & Pop Albums 2008**  
December 18-31 2008

## GIG

### Wildbirds & Peacedrums

If music really is the food of love, then Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin have much heartier appetites than their skinny, indie-kid frames suggest. The Swedish duo met at Gothenburg's Academy Of Music And Drama and started performing as Wildbirds & Peacedrums in 2005, around the time they also married. So it's easy to hear the heady mix of whooping vocals and tumbling drums on their recently released debut album, *Heartcore*, as the soundtrack to new love.

It might seem odd for a band taking cues from blues, jazz and post-punk not to have a guitarist or a bassist but, rather than limiting what Wallentin and Werliin can do, it seems to have the opposite



effect. Freed from three-chord tyranny, their songs bound and somersault with uninhibited joy. Wallentin's studies in vocal improvisation lend her a fearlessness; on *Bird*, she sounds like a giant reincarnation of Bessie Smith straddling the earth, but she shows all-too-human vulnerability on tender ballad *Can't Tell In*

*His Eyes*.

Behind her, Werliin disproves the old jokes about drummers being Neanderthal skin-thumpers, weaving primal yet complex rhythms on his kit. Live, it's just the two of them on drums, vocals and occasional sitar and xylophone,

providing a simple but full-flavoured feast for ears and hearts.

*Abi Bliss*

*Thu, Brudenell Social Club, 33 Queens Road, Leeds, 7.30pm, £7, £6 adv. Tel: 0113 275 2411. www.myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums*

## Metro

9 September 2008

Abi Bliss

**WHAT'S ON THE NME STEREO?**

**WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS**  
*Doubt/Hope (Leaf)*

If it wasn't so ace we'd be throwing envious darts at an atlas. Great natural pop band from Sweden. Again.

## NME Playlist

12 April 2008

### Wildbirds And Peacedrums

Records played once in the *Plan B* bunker are usually biro-labeled stuff like 'generic', 'car advert', or – most cruelly – 'support band'. 'Cabaret' is another, and usually betokens stagey kitsch no one would listen to it home (unless they live in New Orleans) but while Wildbirds And Peacedrums might mine the backstreet dramatics, it's strictly source material. Their *Heartcore* album combines all like a high-stepping boulevardier and waltzes between dark corners, wide streets, doubling between quarters. [www.myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums](http://www.myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums)

## Plan B

2008

Despite the fact that Marian Wallentin and Andreas Werlin met whilst studying together at the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg in 2004, when it came to recording the songs that ended up on their *Heartcore* album, released in April of this year, they were a bit clueless as to how to use the recording equipment.

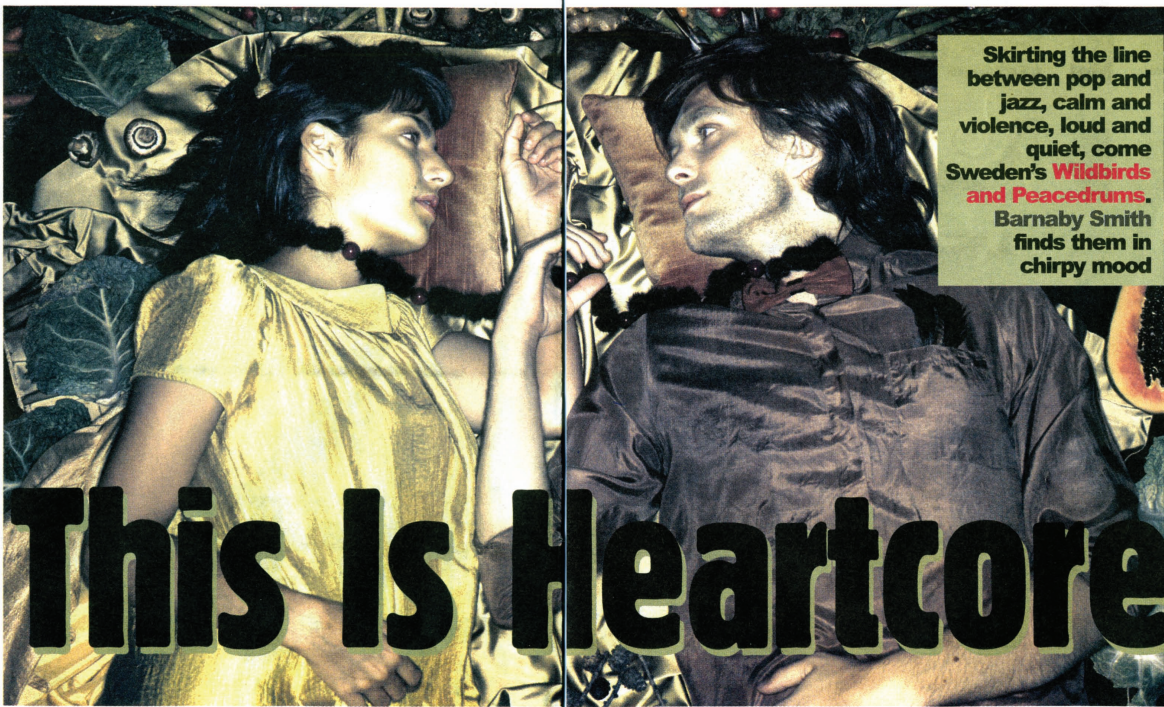
So, to compensate (as well as the fact their earthy and uncomplicated approach came naturally), they set about creating a music that was unembellished, natural and primal in its passion, yet still distinctly avant garde. They based everything around the special talents of their two members: Wallentin's extraordinary wail and the leftfield, experimental percussion of Werlin. Hence the name, Wildbirds and Peacedrums.

*Heartcore* was an adventure in combining instrumental variety with emotional variety. A glockenspiel here, a sitar or a zither there, even things like gamelans are in the mix too, not to mention Werlin's tribal, unobtrusive drumming. It's not for everyone, but it's nothing if not new.

Then there is Wallentin's voice. Sometimes all strange and chirrupy a la Bjork or Joanna Newsom, sometimes more soulful and reminiscent of My Brightest Diamond, always untrained and intimate.

"Hmm, I just sound like I sound," says Wallentin, "I don't know, sometimes I feel like all my feelings and different states of being have their own voice, so I can sound fragile one day and strong the other. But in the end I guess I just have my voice as it is, like you have a name or an eye colour, and that is the thing I will try and come closer and closer to, that is, my whole life will be about that, to get closer to the core."

Wildbirds and Peacedrums began performing in 2005, the same year that Wallentin and Werlin were married. The songs on *Heartcore* were written two years ago when the couple lived in a house on a remote island for a year, with the intention of "just wanting to make a pure and honest debut recording," according to Wallentin. That they undoubtedly did, but no thanks to their training at the Academy of Music and Drama. In previous interviews Werlin has sneered at the "music judged only upon level and virtuosity", and the stifling influence of institutionalised



**London Tourdates**  
Spring 2008  
Barnaby Smith

musical learning. "It was the way of controlling music," agrees Wallentin, "stopping the natural flow of being creative, and the way of analyzing music into tiny pieces, instead of feeling it whole and alive."

"The relationship between a teacher and a student is hard," adds Werlin, "there are too many underlying things to live up to that have nothing to do with creating music."

The idea, it seems, is to unlearn what they have learnt, in favour of expressing what comes naturally. And listening to *Heartcore*, it feels like almost like physical compulsion towards music, rather than a record made with any thought or intention behind it. Werlin puts it well when he says "we like good sounding instruments that are pretty easy to play, where the technique doesn't have to be in the way of the expression."

Despite the fact it is nigh on impossible to put a label on what Wildbirds and Peacedrums do, they were somewhat inexplicably named as Jazz in Sweden 2008 winners. *Heartcore* probably does compare with various schools of jazz in its curious time signatures and arrangements, but it still seems somewhat tenuous, especially when you consider the fact they are part of, albeit peripherally, a healthy Swedish pop scene that also includes Lykke Li, Loney, Dear and El Perro Del Mar. Does jazz in any way ring true as a description of their music?

"Maybe, maybe not," says Wallentin, "we don't care really what we are, as long as it feels good and honest and we can do what we want. We see the free elements in music as the foundation, so in that way we are just as much jazz as we are pop or melancholic blues, it depends on what the one who's listening is hearing."

Neither Wallentin or Werlin came from musical backgrounds. Werlin's parents had little musical interest except for "a good Neil Young record collection" (though you'd be pretty hard-pressed to find anything in their music resembling the old folk-rock curmudgeon). Wallentin's Swedish mother is an unemployed care nurse, while her Iranian father lives in Spain. The absence of a musical indoctrination during childhood only serves to reinforce the fact that the pair's music is a pressing urge from their physical cores, rather than anything as bland as a career choice. "That

way I have really felt that this way of expressing is coming from deep within myself, my choice, my need," says Wallentin.

The other consequence of such a primal approach is that songwriting becomes a slightly disjointed process. For W&P, it is more a case of trial and error and experimentation, giving the impression with many of *Heartcore*'s songs, that they are being written as you listen to them. It is a startling effect.

"First come the lyrics," says Wallentin, "in pieces or as a whole piece already, and then we mostly improvise and play around it, to find just the exact motion for it, to make it a perfect match. But sometimes the melody and rhythm is there instantly, it totally depends on the song and how we feel it."

The other important part of the W&P story, or at least the fact they are able to release and perform in the UK, is the Leaf Label. Tony Morley's Yorkshire-based label have long been experts at picking off fascinating things - many from Scandinavia - from underground scenes worldwide and bringing them to prominence. Even the mighty Caribou benefited from Leaf. Not that was anything even slightly glamorous about the process for W&P. "It was MySpace! No kidding," says Wallentin. "Word got around and mails were sent."

The exposure the Leaf Label has given the duo has at least partly paved the way for them to make new music, music that has "stronger direction, more melodies, big and powerful, but still very pure," according to Wallentin.

In the mean time, the next step is release *The Snake*, their second album that is already out in Sweden. Before then, festivals, and tours of Europe and, interestingly, China. Of course, the Wildbirds and Peacedrums live show is just as eye opening as their charismatic studio offerings.

"Every show turns out to be totally different for us," says Werlin, "a problem that's only solved by trying to keep the show as physical, in both directions - calm and violent - as possible." And herein lies the essence of Wildbirds and Peacedrums.

*Wildbirds and Peacedrums play Industry on 15 September. For ticket info call 020 7422 0950.*

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

At The Betsey Trotwood, Islington

by James Skinner

Strange old venue, the Betsey Trotwood. Inconceivably small, shuddering as the Tube shuttles beneath it with a distinct tinge of damp in the air (we are in the cellar after all), tonight it plays host to Sweden's superbly monikered

**Wildbirds & Peacedrums.**

Lineup: Wildbirds & Peacedrums  
Date: 01/04/2008  
Venue: The Betsey Trotwood, Islington

DiS first encountered this explosive boy-girl duo a month and a half previous at Oslo's **by:Larm** festival where they frankly rocked the pants off all they encountered, emerging as one of the most talked about bands of the weekend – dynamic, sharp and none-more-visceral. This will be their first performance in the UK (before heading to the rather staterly Queen Elizabeth Hall tomorrow night to support label-mates and DiS favourites Efterklang, **review**) and the two adjoining rooms that comprise the basement are suitably packed out.

Onwards! Mariam Wallentin fronts Wildbirds & Peacedrums, and as she shyly introduces the band you could be forgiven for sensing some pre-show nerves. The performance that follows obliterates such notions, Wallentin's stage presence and Andreas Werliin's virtuosic manipulation of the drum-kit rendering the duo – married duo, none of that White Stripes/Kills ambivalence here – nothing less than a spectacle to behold.

Of course, the very nature of their performance immediately marks them out a force to be reckoned with, devastatingly simple in execution (percussion, vocals, occasional use of a stand up sitar) – yet wilfully complex in compositional terms. The set this evening ranges from the bruising to the beautiful, the avant-garde to the blissfully straightforward, remaining at all times provocative, fascinating, and not without an almost primal charge.

Behold: the deranged yet tuneful rattle of '*Doubt/Hope*', the serene grace underpinning '*I Can't Tell In His Eyes*' (perhaps the most conventional of all songs offered us here), and bizarre observations elsewhere ("*We are all turning into furniture!*"). Wallentin herself is an extraordinary front-woman – there's something of Chan Marshall in her fluid, expressive delivery, while Werliin's prowess at the drum-kit is astounding; suitably restrained/muscular as necessitated, shoe-less, even ably duetting with his partner at one point.

It's difficult to communicate how much they impress without descending into twittering hyperbole. By the time they reach an inevitable encore Wallentin has brought out her own drum to further the intensity of the often machine-gun climaxes, and gasps of astonishment resonate throughout the cellar at the vivacity and invention on display. There's no further recommendation I can really give, and short of closing this review with a rubbish pun about flying high or anything like that, simply implore any interested party check these magnificent Wildbirds out.

Wildbirds & Peacedrums

1 / 10

## Drowned in Sound

16 April 2008

James Skinner

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

**Guitar-less blues** Luminaire,  
Thursday

Try and file this Swedish duo at your peril. A husband-and-wife team, W&P play primal, ecstatic, skeletal blues-folk on just drums and voice, with the slightest melodies and scrappiest of percussion lending a hand, like they're waiting for the rest of the band to turn up. Drummer Andreas Werliin says he and Mariam Wallentin are inspired by 'voice music from west Africa', old soul records and the drone metal of such ground-rumblers as Earth and Sunn O))). And they have a recent history of playing venues inhabited by jazzers.

'So far, we have no idea where we're going,' says a bewildered Werliin. 'We play in all kinds of places, supporting all kinds of bands... Right now we're at a jazz festival in Athens! Which is hard because jazz has a historical burden and the audience is grown up and they have their own ideas how music should sound. I don't really know if what we do is new, or very old.'

Graduates of Gothenburg's



*Eating in bed is never a good idea*

Academy of Music, where Mariam studied the vocal improv – part Björk inventiveness, part grand old blues dame – that Andreas drums around on stunning debut LP '*Heartcore*', theirs is a sound borne out of a necessity to find an (*cough*) honest way to perform. It's easy to mock such high-minded sentiments, but in our consensual climate it's a noble thing indeed that these self-styled underdogs want their spiritual pop to be provocative.

We can think of no kinder way to be roused. *Chris Parkin*  
Further listening: [tinyurl.com/4p54uw](http://tinyurl.com/4p54uw)

## Time Out

June 5-11 2008

Chris Parkin



HEARTCORE  
Wildbirds & Peacedrums  
Leaf

★★★★★

This Swedish duo's debut album is a doozy. Part ritual, part improvisation, and incorporating jazz, blues and pop idioms, vocalist Mariam Wallentin and percussionist Andreas Werliin's charged collection of songs is astonishing in its dynamic sparseness. Wallentin's vocals (a mixture of croon, chant, drone and ululation) form the melodic line of each song, around which Werliin wraps a rhythmic and minimal array of instrumentation and percussion (zither, glockenspiel, drums, piano and handclaps) to create compositions that soar and swoop like free-form improvisations but develop and deliver like carefully wrought songs, filled with energy, violence, intelligence and emotion. From the ecstatic gospel of *Bird* and the bouncing rockabilly of *The Way Things Go*, to the primal pop of *Doubt/Hope* and the bluesy ballad *Pony*, *Wildbirds & Peacedrums* is a startlingly original album. [www.posteverything.com/leaf](http://www.posteverything.com/leaf) **JOCELYN CLARKE**

Download tracks: *Bird*, *Doubt/Hope*

**The Irish Times**  
30 May 2008  
Jocelyn Clarke

**Critics' choice**  
Hot albums



**Wildbirds And Peacedrums**  
*'Heartcore'*, The Leaf Label  
Swedish drummer and improv vocalist deliver intense, minimal blues-folk on their transfixingly beautiful debut.

**Time Out**  
May 2008

**Wildbirds & Peacedrums**

★★★★★

**Heartcore** The Leaf Label

Another week, another brilliant husband and wife duo; this time a drummer and a vocal improv graduate who hail from Sweden, probably don't wear shoes, and make intense, minimal blues-folk about black horses, deep waters and the transcendent power of the smallest moments. Veering from unhinged spirituals to ecstatic laments, with only the occasional suggestion of a drum therapy workshop, this is a weird and wild yet transfixingly beautiful debut.  
*Bella Todd*

**Time Out**  
21 April 2008  
Bella Todd

### Wildbirds & Peacedrums

That Sweden's Wildbirds & Peacedrums are a husband-and-wife duo is unusual, although hardly without precedent. It's the instrumentation employed by Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin, however, that's rarer than hen's teeth, a palette more often than not restricted solely to (her) vocals and (his) drums. The results are unsurprisingly sparse, yet interest is maintained by the parts themselves - as

impressive as one would expect from a pair who met at Gothenburg's Academy of Music and Drama - as well as their often idiosyncratic execution. The overall effect, simultaneously primal and flirting with the avant garde, is utterly bewitching, landing somewhere between pagan blues and skeletal, experimental soul. *Album 'Heartcore' is out now on the Leaf label. Wildbirds & Peacedrums are on tour from 14-23 May.*

To listen to Independent Music Radio, visit [www.independent.co.uk/radio](http://www.independent.co.uk/radio) Show 4 will be available on 14 May

**Independent Music - Ones to Watch**  
12 May 2008  
Marcus O'Dair

**Music: Wildbirds & Peacedrums \* \* \* \***  
Heartcore (Leaf)

Friday May 09 2008

Boy-girl duos are 10-a-penny these days, but this [Gothenburg](#) husband-and-wife team offer a quirkier take on the stripped down blues so beloved of their peers. There are no guitars -- just vocals and all manner of percussion. [Miriam Wallentin's](#) singing veers from fragile to primal and [Andreas Werliin's](#) inventive drumming provides an unusual and highly captivating accompaniment. At times, it's as minimal as you can get without going completely a capella. Heartcore isn't the easiest listen, but persevere and songs such as *I Can't Tell In His Eyes* and *Pony* prove to be particularly durable.

Sometimes the pair's sonic adventurousness gets in the way of coherent songs and Werliin's excursions into free-form jazz percussion is hit or miss. But those seeking something a world away from the norm will be rewarded. n



Wildbirds & Peacedrums - Heartcore

**Irish Independent**  
9 May 2008  
Nick Kelly



Wildbirds and Peacedrums:  
*Heartcore*  
[Leaf; 2008]  
Rating: 8.0

Buy it from InSound

Download it from eMusic

It's easy to think that music made by relatively few people, with relatively familiar instruments, should fall under the canopy of "folk": uncluttered, transparent, linked to past traditions. Wildbirds and Peacedrums-- husband-and-wife Swedes Andreas Werliin and Mariam Wallentin-- compose most of their debut, *Heartcore*, with Werliin's compact drum work and Wallentin's orbital, precise vocals; there is an arc to their work that imbues it with the austerity and heartiness (no pun) of folk music. Despite its simple ingredients, *Heartcore* is neither native nor instinctual. "Primal" or "sparse" miss the point, too; *Heartcore*, instead, is cleverly orchestrated pop music preternaturally reliant on the skills of its performers: Both Werliin and Wallentin were music school dropouts, and their technically sound playing disguises the complexity and range of *Heartcore's* material.

The album *Heartcore* strangely resembles is Nina Simone's *In Concert*; where Simone used tactful playing and sly phrasing to redress Gershwin or a song about pirates, W&P build murder ballads with tinny, metronomic percussion and tense rock'n'roll with handclaps and double-tracked wails. Other instruments-- electric piano, rippling guitar, moony organ-- are in the mix as ornamentation: Only the drums are allowed to roll downhill. Wallentin mimics Simone's deep, mannish voice and almost asexual engagement with her material but oversell/rhetoric aside she rightfully garners comparisons to Björk's bluster or Joanna Newsom's clench. (Another contemporary: The first line in "Bird" is actually "I am a bird now.") Wallentin's legit pipes carry *Heartcore's* swirling, clackety uptempo numbers: "Doubt/Hope", "The Way Things Go", and "The Ones That Should Save Me Get Me Down" rely on little more than Werliin's tethered kitwork. Doubt is a theme whenever the lyrics seem autobiographical, to the point where "The Way Things Go" serves as proper self-help: "I neeeeeed/ To love myseeeeeelf/ More."

Werliin steps from behind his kit to duet on the violent "The Battle in Water" and his comparatively untrained male vox sounds phantasmal: "I am in the wilderness/ You turned out my light/ This time I will make things right/ I get cold by fire/ She said..." and then Wallentin again, "Let me swim/ I'm no one's pet." W&P may have overplayed their hand a bit naming the album *Heartcore*, but they deserve credit for these resonant, personal dramas.

The instrumental framing of the album allows the W&P plenty of elbow room, but *Heartcore* still fails when the duo becomes overly reliant on balladry: Whatever percussion/string instrument plinks along with "Lost Love" can't draw a melody out of Wallentin; "Nakina"'s buttressed bass kicks are the only arrangement that might be called out as lazy, and both move at a glacial pace.

During "Mississippi Goddam" Nina Simone exclaims, to the delight of the crowd, "This is a showtune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet"; *Heartcore* exemplifies this sense of constructed intrigue: Wallentin notes, "All of the people are running to the theater." Peek, too, at the resplendent closer, "We Hold Each Other Song", tipping its cards in two movements: first a low-hum organ dirge and then a loving, jaunty coda. "The inside is not new," Wallentin states. True, but what Werliin and Wallentin surround it with requires plenty of exploration.

✦ **MySpace:** <http://www.myspace.com/wildbirdsandpeacedrums>

✦ **MP3:** Wildbirds and Peacedrums: Doubt/Hope [Video]

- Andrew Gaerig, June 2, 2008

**Pitchfork**  
2 June 2008  
Andrew Gaerig

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums: Heartcore

1 vote ?

by James Skinner

Type: Album

Release date: 28/04/2008

Label: Leaf

Info: CD & Digital



Formed four years ago at Gothenburg's Academy of Music and Drama out of mutual dissatisfaction at the rigid teaching practices of said institution, Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin were married the following summer of 2005 – shortly after they had begun performing under the moniker

**Wildbirds & Peacedrums**. The couple have racked up an impressive catalogue of live performances in their native Sweden (also emerging one of the buzz-bands of the "Scandinavian SXSW" by:Larm), and as a result of their thrillingly uncompromising nature – where Wallentin's expressive vocals are backed by Werliin's drumming and scant little else, this UK release of their first album (following hand-packaged CDRs of a couple years back) is appropriately eagerly anticipated.

By virtue of their formidable prowess in the field however, the duo immediately back themselves into a corner. Theirs is a primal, intuitive sound – an outstanding live act they may be (where Wallentin captivates with her delivery) the predicament of how to translate this to tape remains. Indeed, *Heartcore* doesn't make for an easy first listen – dissonant clangs of sitar clashing with repeated vocals on the opening 'Pony' ("Don't lose – just let loose!") before the drums make themselves known on the forthright, propulsive 'The Way Things Go'. Things take a turn for the eerily avant-garde on 'Bird', where heavy tom-tom strikes bolster an almost stream-of-consciousness, spiralling series of intonations: it's dark, preternaturally arresting stuff.

By way of this opening salvo of tracks it certainly demands your attention. Come the fourth, however, we see an abrupt change of pace with 'I Can't Tell In His Eyes' (available as a Download). A twinkling, serene number that finds Wallentin pondering the virtues of an implied partner ("I can't tell... if he's gonna cry or if he's gonna fight"), the vocal ranges from tremulous to inordinately powerful, occasionally augmented by whispers and spectral chants. It's far more instantly accessible than those preceding (recalling Joanna Newsom at her most tender), as is the subsequent frenzied, joyous clatter of single 'Doubt/Hope' – perhaps the most immediate of the duo's more up-tempo tunes. Werliin's drums are bolstered by handclaps and all manner of percussive aids to massive, vital effect. As the song climaxes to Wallentin's repeated lyric "Just a little hope, maybe – everywhere", the passionate, infectious nature of proceedings is almost exhausting.

Indeed, after repeated listens what may initially seem obtuse becomes keenly sensitive, and the 'difficult' nature of much of what's offered gradually dissipates. The emphasis production-wise stays true to replicating the essential humanity of the band's live performance – all the more encouraging in a climate where 'demanding' or 'experimental' often act as viable substitutes for 'quality'.

The album's high watermark arrives just after its halfway point as Werliin duets with his partner on the oppressive, sinister and quite stunning 'The Battle In Water'. Seemingly a murder-ballad of sorts, Wallentin is as soulfully evocative as ever, alternating lines with Werliin's nasal though oddly apt contribution. Myriad metaphorical suggestions are implied regards the strength of a turbulent ocean, in the midst of the fullest, most satisfying arrangement on the record.

After this highlights pour thick and fast, from the abrasive 'The Ones That Should Save Me Get Me Down' through the graceful, shuffling minimalism of 'Nakina'. In 'The Window' too, Wallentin's voice cracks and ululates with thrillingly feral velocity, the drumming potent and the lyrics a mission statement, impossible to reproduce via the medium of raw text alone:

"I could be an – an observ-er! / A lonely girl! – or a wi-ild bird..."

In summary then, *Heartcore* is a first offering as suitably untamed as it is fervently (unexpectedly) beautiful, emotional impact resonating throughout – most tangibly in its tranquil moments, though strikingly so when it ups the volume. It's not flawless (the ambient chime of 'A Story From A Chair' notably strays towards the inconsequential), though this is perhaps to be expected given the pair's provocative, freewheeling approach. It remains as bold and imaginative a debut you'll hear all year, from a duo whose unified talent and staggering virtuosity marks out a very bright future indeed.

Wildbirds & Peacedrums

8 / 10

## Drowned in Sound

28 April 2008

James Skinner

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums

Heartcore

(The Leaf Label)

We get a bit jazzy, from time to time, here at Artrocker. Just look back over the years and you'll see musings on the likes of Acoustic Ladyland, Led Bib, and Chick Budo in our pages. Yep, each and every Artrocker is part cat (wild, cool crazy cat, that is). And there's nothing we like more than discovering someone, in some dark corner, who's found a new twist on the genre – just like our lovely Ladylanders.

So it was a very happy artrocker who came across Wildbirds & Peacedrums, while exploring the more shadowy parts of Oslo recently (see by:Larm festival review). And, you'll be wondering, what are the twists on the jazz model? Well, for a start, there are but two of them – both, like Love Is All, from Gothenburg, Sweden. They are Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin. This allows us to group them in with the current crop of exciting pairings, like Blood Red Shoes and John & Jehn. (And, like J & J, they are a couple – indeed, they have gone further and gotten themselves hitched.) But this is a tenuous correlation, at best. Where Wildbirds raise themselves above the fray is in their peculiar way of making music from the most minimal of ingredients. Werliin plays drums and Wallentin sings. That's it.

Only that's not it. Not by a long chalk. Wallentin's vocal performance is, to say the least, extraordinary (and should be experienced live for it to be a full one). Take 'Bird', for example. Using her voice like an instrument, Wallentin starts low, and gradually moves upward in terms of both tone and emotional tension – all set against Werliin's fiercely tribal beats. You forget that it's just the two of them. And they're not done yet. 'Doubt/Hope' sees the drumming reduced further – though with handclaps added – and Wallentin's double-tracked vocal forcing the emotional lack of restraint dial up to number 11. It rocks!

Sure, there are quieter, more genteel moments (eg 'A Story From a Chair'). But, if you're looking for passionate freshness, 'Heartcore' is where it's at.

**Richard Davis**

Out 28 April

**Artrocker**

April 2008

Richard Davis



recently released an album, 'Heartcore', on The Leaf Label, following its success in Sweden.

Vocalist Mariam Wallentin shares some answers to our usual six questions.

ing music?

album?  
ss, war, family. Only big important serious stuff.

rough in creating a track?  
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d Stackenäs, Haruki Murakami, Diamanda Galas, Albert Ayler, Studio Ghibli.

neone experiencing your music for the first time?  
nce, sing with me, feel the beat, the energy is everywhere.

or your latest single, and for the future?  
r someone, somewhere.

## CMU Same Six Questions May 2008

### Wildbirds & Peacedrums: Heartcore (Leaf Label)

May 3 2008

By Owen Lawrence

The debut album from Swedish girl/boy duo Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin blends avant-garde weirdness and mainstream swampy blues rock with an audacious twist. Most of the songs here are simply vocals and drums, and as such they just about trump the White Stripes for stripped down raw power.

The band left audiences open-mouthed when they appeared in London for a few gigs last month. Live they have a unique presence; the fluidity of Werliin's drums and percussion run against the startling force of Wallentin's elemental voice creating a sonic storm that quickly brews to reach alarming ferocity.

The album explores this husband-wife dynamic to extremes and also introduces warm melodic touches on tracks such as My Heart and I Can't Tell In His Eyes that open up a whole new world of musical possibility for the duo, suggesting that there is much more to come.

It is rare to find a band that sound so apart from any scene or musical movement but at the same time feel so timeless and familiar. Wildbirds & Peacedrums are one of those outfits and as such are almost guaranteed to be on the lips of many a tipster before the summer is out.

**Music Week**  
6 May 2008  
Owen Lawrence

## Wildbirds & Peacedrums - 'Heartcore' (Leaf Label) Release 28/04/08

an embarrassment of mighty tunes...

April 11, 2008 by Janne Oinonen

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"I am a bird now", Mariam Wallentin bellows during 'Bird', seemingly channelling a particularly berserk shamanic ceremony, whilst Andreas Werliin attacks his drumkit with a freeform fury, with clattering outcome akin to a percussion workshop in full flow tied to the bumper of a speed limit-busting race car.

Welcome to 'Heartcore', the debut full-length from Swedish duo Wildbirds & Peacedrums. If the uncompromisingly experimental ethos described above sounds like an unwelcome reminder of Scandinavian arts funds' habit for lavishing cash on even the most listener-hostile projects, think again. Having recently introduced us to Manchester's premier folk siren Nancy Elizabeth and NYC-based master of delicate minimalism Essie Jain, Leaf Label has excelled in spotting outstanding female singers lately. The refreshingly unconventional Swedish duo Wildbirds & Peacedrums, fronted by Wallentin's formidable vocal presence, might just be the pick of the exemplary bunch.

In lesser hands, the twosome's uncompromisingly economic approach - focus remains on vocals and percussion throughout - could result in a daunting listen. But although the extreme aural austerity of the handful of tracks where everything bar the tinkle of xylophone is chucked out suggests a musical equivalent of a cost-cutting downsizing frenzy, this is a fully-rounded creation, the hypnotic highlights of which more than compensate for the occasional stumble into skeletal non-eventfulness.

Lack of lush accompaniments means attention remains firmly where it should: on Wallentin's remarkable vocal prowess, reminiscent of Jeff Buckley, an impression aided by a sonic starkness that emits a whiff of Buckley's solo set 'Live at Sin-E'. Whereas the most high-profile Buckley emulators neuter the late US singer's explorative tendencies in order to churn out marketable, blandly melancholy whinges, however, Wallentin's combination of tender intimacy, soaring lung power and jazz-indebted technical chops heads in the opposite direction.

The most out-there moments will have anyone impressed with the vocal extremism of Tim Buckley's 'Lorca' and 'Starsailor' collecting their jaws off the floor, but Wallentin's equally at home amidst half-whispered, caressing cooing. Add to this an embarrassment of mighty tunes such as the majestic, minimalist drama of opener 'Pony', the deep-blue balladry of 'I Can't Tell in His Eyes' and the clattering, drums & vox garage blast 'The Way Things Go', and Wildbirds & Peacedrums are set to reap a fresh bunch of the superlatives Swedish commentators have already lavished on the twosome.

**Gigwise**  
28 April 2008  
Janne Oinonen

## Wildbirds And Peacedrums Heartcore (Leaf)

I copped out of reviewing *Heartcore* when it first emerged last year on Swedish label Found You; I was literally stuck for words. Luckily Leaf's re-release offers a second chance, even though every glued-together phrase seems to obscure, rather than convey boldness. Perhaps the best description is that it's the blues without the blue. Notes are bent into the shapes of feelings, but there's no sign of 12-bar monotony in the courtship of Mariam Wallentin's vocals and Andreas Werliin's intuitive percussion, a set-up that fills spaces with buoyant melodies and curled-up tenderness. Shaking tambourines for sheer fun, overwhelming with a chorus of overdubs or content to leave echoes hanging in the air, it's freak-folk made by people who bounce out of bed in the morning. Unlike me, they nail being eloquent first time.

Abi Bliss

## Plan B

April 2008

Abi Bliss

## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

HEARTCORE  
(LEAF)



Turning a quirk into an exceptional talent is something many musicians may have done in the past but there's something so focused and dominating about the music

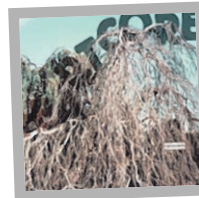
of Swedish pairing Mariam Wallentin and Andreas Werliin that you really can't deny their creativity. Stripping their music down to the bare bones of drums and voice (with a few strung out glockenspiels and pianos here and there) there's a distinct chance that every track could become a uniform exploration of the self-enforced limitations. But no, 'Heartcore' covers an immense amount of ground, grinding up gut-wrenching folk with pagan pulsations and truly experimental, dazzling vocal delivery right the way through. Taking blues singers like Bessie Smith as the basis for her delivery Mariam sprinkles her lyrics with crescendos and ascending notation creating radical melodies that coil themselves in and around the percussion. 'Doubt/Hope' is an early peak that accentuates its upbeat influence and 'The Battle In Water' also leaves a lasting impression with its nautical lament rolling across the sparse piano patterns. Working just as well in the spasmodic outbursts it's in the more contemplative moments that Mariam's voice seems to sparkle for she has this precise knack for tackling and conveying her mood. It's hard for her percussive partner to ever steal or pull focus, as the essence of Wildbirds & Peacedrums lies in interplay between Mariam's excesses, but Andreas manages to serve up a driving thickness in his drumming and a melodic sparseness that the album so sorely craves and relies on.

OLI MARLOW

## Rock-A-Rolla

March/April 08

Oli Marlow



## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS: Heartcore (Leaf)

★★★★☆

SWEDISH duo Wildbirds & Peacedrums are a sparse blend of Andreas Werliin's primal rhythms and Mariam Wallentin's heartfelt vocals.

The music on this reissued 2006 debut veers from pop to jazz to folk in a freestyle way without any obvious comparisons; the naked feeling from Wallentin's voice carrying it wherever it needs to go with ease.

## Irish Daily Star

25 April 2008

Mark Kavanagh



## WILDBIRDS AND PEACEDRUMS HEARTCORE

THE LEAF LABEL

If you consider Feist too "mainstream" then I dare you to enjoy 'Heartcore' from Swedish duo Wildbirds And Peacedrums, a VERY free-sung spiritual pop record that drifts whimsically and often brilliantly into songs that would melt gently beneath dinner party chatter. And yet I pray to the ethereal gods that this couple seem so determined to conjure through the harks, chants and laments that saturate this record, that the absolute gem of a blues tune 'I Can't Tell In His Eyes' doesn't get drowned in such loosely delivered notes. The mind diminishing madwoman chants of 'A Story From A Chair' is a bit weird, even by my standards, but then sharp experimental music can deliver small delights also; Mariam Wallentin's vocals never fail to please and the bare naked blues of 'The Ones That Should Save Me Get Me Down' truthfully evokes a sentiment of sadness in its raw minimalism.

## Clash

May 2008



## WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS HEARTCORE

LEAF

This debut from Swedish couple Wildbirds & Peacedrums is a sparse, chilling meeting of Mariam Wallentin's impassioned vocals and husband Andreas Werliin's clever drumming and percussion. It's a beautiful and unique match. Wallentin's voice makes the record – she sounds like she's channeling an old bluesman one minute, before flitting into a cool, Feist-inspired drawl or one of a hundred other vocal tricks she has up her sleeve. It's a brave move to accompany her voice so sparingly but it pays off. There's a smattering of piano, guitar and glockenspiel here and there, but overall they are very aptly named. Wild birds and peacedrums indeed. **Niall Harden**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

DOWNLOAD: 'DOUBT / HOPE', 'WE HOLD EACH OTHER SONG'.

FOR FANS OF: REGINA SPEKTOR, TEGAN & SARA.

## Alternative Ulster

May 2008

Niall Harden

Wildbirds & Peacedrums



### Swedish Outsiders

ICA / CAFÉ OTO  
LONDON, UK

Everything's a festival nowadays. One gig at the ICA plus a 'fringe' event the following night at Dalston's Cafe OTO equals a festival of Swedish experimentalism. I had friends over for dinner twice last week – it must have been a food festival without my realising.

But Swedish Outsiders set a high standard for such urban micro-events, making no awkward attempts to round up two highly eclectic bills covering Improv, electronic minimalism, noise and elemental blues into an artificially neat package. Acts were presented with a minimum of fuss and the audiences filed in and out accordingly as their interest was grabbed.

The ICA highlights came early. BJ Nilsen's laptop set built into a silvery resonant roar of sound, like multiple overdubbed jet engines caught at that vertiginous moment when tons of steel succeed in escaping gravity. It died out slowly into what could have been the sound of tuning forks struck on those same engines. Folke Rabe's tape based experiments immediately followed, and the shift from 21st century digitalism to 1960s analogue fell flat with his first plunderphonics-style collage of rock 'n' roll radio DJ patter. But his exquisite *What??* turned things around. A favourite of Jim O'Rourke's (who also reissued the piece on his own Dexter's Cigar label), *What??* takes a six-note 'melody' and stretches it over 25 minutes. Rabe teases out the harmonics implicit in each note over its allotted minutes into a dizzyingly sensual web of colour and stillness.

A duo debut by Mats Gustafsson and Evan Parker came next, a more spiky and serrated

experience altogether. Their dialogue was interesting, and became a vignette of old master/young apprentice, as Parker, stock still, poured out a clear stream of alto runs, while Gustafsson bobbed and weaved anxiously next to him, wrenching guttural belches from his baritone sax. With the duo joined by Pat Thomas on synth and Roger Turner on drums, more was less; the thread was lost, although Turner's spidery, scuttling sticks did elicit some memorable bursts from the rest at times.

Out on the fringe things were no less eclectic, and the same dynamic of bold start/flatter finish prevailed. Hans Appelqvist closed the event with an elaborate measurement of the distance between kitsch and whimsy. Essentially a playback of his animation work with passages of live guitar accompaniment, Appelqvist's set was bookended (and summed up) by YouTube clips of a baby panda being cute. Henrik Rylander's preceding set of abrasive electronics was far more intriguing – and much more 'live'. It had also kicked the energy levels up substantially after a very muted improvised session by David Stackenäs, Joe Williamson and Phil Durrant. In fact the trio began in such a withdrawn and pared down mode that a Cafe Oto barman had to head outside to ask the pavement drinkers to stop drowning them out. But Stackenäs et al were no less hampered by having to follow the orchestrated din of Wildbirds & Peacedrums, the duo of Mariam Wallentin (vocals) and Andreas Werliin (drums). Using pop, blues and soul as rough templates, the two tapped into an elemental vein reminiscent of early Animal Collective in the way it bypassed familiar song forms by fusing freewheeling melody and primal rhythms.

SAM DAVIES

### The Wire

July 2008

Sam Davies

### WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

THE CLUNY,  
NEWCASTLE, 20-05-08

Passers-by would be forgiven for thinking the All Blacks rugby team were in town, but the impassioned noise akin to the Kiwis' ritualistic war dance is in fact being created by the diminutive Swedish duo of drummer Andreas Werliin and his vocalist wife Mariam Wallentin. Showcasing the pagan swamp-rock and bewitching balladry of their debut album 'Heartcore', the night climaxes with 'Doubt/Hope's' glacial tapping and wailing. All they need now is a rugby team to be formed in their honour.

Andrew Fenwick

### NME

7 June 2008

Andrew Fenwick

### Wildbirds & Peacedrums

London, Betsey Trotwood

Sometimes, standing open-mouthed in awe is the only appropriate reaction to a performance. To say Wildbirds & Peacedrums don't disappoint is to vastly underplay what happens tonight. Singer Mariam is possessed of an emotive, feline voice and a (possibly homemade) zither. But despite her arresting presence, it's drummer Andreas who really captivates: at one with his kit, he strokes out energising rolling rhythms with intuitive elegance. Highlight 'Doubt/Hope' offers an intoxicating combination of her Co-coRosie-esque tones and his snare-centred tinkering. A show and a half – see them immediately.

Charlie Ivens

### The Fly

May 2008

Charlie Ivens