

**Time Was Away**  
**Emily Portman & Rob Harbron**



**PRESS RELEASE**

**Rob Records Cat No:** ROBREC CD04

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**Single:** Meeting Point, 24/10/2022

**Key Tracks:** Meeting Point, The Healths, Borstal Boy

**Website:** [www.emilyandrob.uk](http://www.emilyandrob.uk)

*Highly anticipated debut folk song album from two of the finest performers on the English folk scene.*

*Time Was Away* is Emily Portman & Rob Harbron's debut duo album, comprising eight English folk songs and two 20<sup>th</sup> century poems set to music. Recorded and produced by the award-winning Andy Bell of Hudson Records, the album is a quietly powerful masterwork that deftly treads the tightrope between contemporary and timeless.

*Time Was Away* weaves together an intricate tapestry of story-songs on themes of resilience and resistance in the face of loss, hardship, hunger and brutality, opening a window into our past with tales that still resonate deeply in contemporary Britain. Emily & Rob skilfully draw listeners into a world where strangers play cards on highways, time stands still in coffee shops, hungry poachers meet ill fates in dank woods, repressed women dream of finding freedom in wild moors, and all the while the birds sing sweetly above the cars and diggers of England's edgelands.

Together the duo have found a kinship in their absorbing and artisanal approaches to their material, which they bring to light with great care and attention to detail. Emily's crystalline vocals and homespun banjo-playing are complimented by Rob's understated musicianship as he shows his agility not only as a virtuosic English concertina player, but on guitar, harmonium and pocket piano. Both musicians take turns playing the atmospheric old upright piano at Red Kite studio in rural Wales where they recorded the album. Field recordings capture urban sounds near Emily's Liverpool home and overlay contemporary landscapes onto old pastoral songs. Joining the duo on two tracks is Pete Judge of Three Cane Whale, who adds the proverbial cherry on top with some tasty flugel horn.

*Time Was Away* opens with 'Two Healths', a lush, layered delight with lyrics that highlight the inequalities between rich and poor, set to a melody written by Rob. The words for the hard-hitting 'Borstal Boy' were found graffitied on a toilet wall, whereas 'Oh to be Alone' takes its words from an anonymous poem in a suffragette pamphlet where it was described as "echoing the heart cries of 10,000 women who still sit at the feet of fate even whilst their spirits rebel". 'Rosanna' is a 6-minute triumph of a ballad about the power sisterhood, showing the duo in their element as storytellers. The cornerstone of the album is perhaps 'Meeting Point', a poem written by Louis MacNiece and set to music by Tim Dalling. The opening line 'Time was away and somewhere else' is where the album gets its name. In their sensitive interpretation of 'Meeting Point' and throughout the album, Emily and Rob conjure those liminal moments when a good song transports both musician and listener to a place where time stands still.

In this unapologetically dark and yet quietly optimistic album, Emily & Rob highlight stories of resilience in hard times. These are not romantic songs of a chocolate box England: these are the vibrant, messy tales of a relatably flawed set of characters, whose voices ring clearly through the ages. *Time Was Away* is a masterclass in understatement and is sure to be a folk highlight of 2022.

## Quotes

*"English folk comes no more enchanted than Emily Portman's delicately sung tales"*  
The Guardian

*"Rob Harbron is a musical hound, showing an endless energy and a fine nose for a melody"*  
Songlines

## **Time Was Away Launch Tour Dates**

### **Part 1**

4/11/22 Temperance Café LEMINGTON SPA  
5/11/22 Wiltshire Music Centre BRADFORD UPON AVON  
6/11/22 Cornish Bank FALMOUTH  
10/11/2022 Kings Place LONDON  
11/11/2022 Bridgewater Arts Centre  
12/11/22 The Art House SOUTHAMPTON

### **Part 2**

22/02/23 Exeter Phoenix EXETER  
23/02/23 Huntington Hall WORCESTER  
24/02/23 THE FOLKLORE ROOMS BRIGHTON  
26/02/2023 Prince Albert Inn STROUD  
02/03/23 Dartington Hall TOTNES  
03/03 The Spring Arts & Heritage Centre HAVANT  
04/03/23 Hornblotton Village Hall SHEPTON MALLETT

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## **Biographies**

Emily Portman & Rob Harbron both have award-winning reputations as performers, composers and recording artists. Now they have formed an inspired new collaboration in which they delve into English folk traditions, creating a boldly exposed and intricately woven contemporary folk sound.

**Emily** (voice, banjo & piano) is best known as an original songwriter and for her work with the acclaimed folk band The Furrow Collective. **Rob** (concertina, guitar, voice) tours with Leveret, Fay Hield, Jon Boden and many more, being in great demand as one of the finest multi-instrumentalists in the UK.

Together they take a fresh approach to exploring the traditional music they are both steeped in, drawing out the contemporary relevance in their repertoire with master craftsmanship. Emily's spellbinding storytelling and unaffected voice combines with Rob's sympathetic musicality to create an unforgettable and intimate live experience, brimming with a focused subtlety, depth and a shared love of the music.

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