

Ballads from long ago: The local duo shares their take on medieval legends

David Steinberg / For the Journal



Johanna Hongell-Darsee, left, and Scott Darsee perform tonight at the Outpost.

You can get quite an education in geography and musical history just by listening to the border-crossing ballads on the new CD “The Wandering Ballad.”

The album of medieval and traditional ballads is performed by Albuquerque’s Scott Darsee and Johanna Hongell-Darsee.

Take, for example, a ballad based on a medieval narrative poem that’s presented in four variations on separate cuts.

One variation of the ballad, “Les Tristes Noces,” is from France. In that version, two sisters are separated at birth. One sister is a man’s concubine and the other becomes his wife, Darsee said.

“When the mother is at the wedding and sees the mistress, she faints. Then the story comes out,” he explained.

There are three other variations of the ballad. Another, “Fair Annie,” is from the British Isles, a third from Sweden and a fourth from Swedish-speaking Finland share the name Skön Anna.

Scott Darsee and Johanna Hongell-Darsee

WHEN: 8 tonight

WHERE: Outpost Performance Space, 210 Yale SE

HOW MUCH: \$20 general public at ampconcerts.org, at Hold My Ticket, 112 Second SW, by calling 886-1251 or at the door

“Singers made their own variants so we are following that tradition by doing our own thing with the songs,” said vocalist-instrumentalist Hongell-Darsee.

You also can find on the CD four versions of the legend of a young couple who elope to fulfill their love. One version is from Finland (“King Vallemo”), one from the British Isles (“Earl Brand”) and two from the United States (“Sweet William” and “Wake Up”).

“A lot of the ballads used to be a whole evening’s entertainment. The balladeer would go on and on with verse after verse. We trimmed them to make them more accessible,” Darsee said.

The CD contains one cut that’s a riddle – and it’s called just that, “Riddle” – in the form of a song.

“That’s the only one on the CD that’s not part of a longer story,” Hongell-Darsee said.

A native of Finland’s Swedish-speaking minority, she studied theater and dance in Paris and in India. Darsee, who is from Iowa, plays guitars and bass on the album. He is also a songwriter and a poet.