

## THE WHITMORE SISTERS

### Ghost Stories

Red House Records; January 21, 2022

Ghosts are always with us, waiting for the right moment, or reason, to reveal themselves. Then a song, a stretch of road, or someone's laughter hits your ear, and suddenly you're back in the moment, feeling the rush of emotions as if time never moved on. For **Eleanor and Bonnie Whitmore**, two of roots music's most accomplished songwriter/ instrumentalist/ vocalists, the ghosts chose to appear right as Covid became entrenched – when live music evaporated and people were isolated from each other.

Bonnie, whose four solo albums are all state-of-a-real-woman's-heart jewels, decided to join sister Eleanor and her husband **Chris Masterson** in their Los Angeles closed circle for a break. Chris, who's recorded four albums with his wife as The Mastersons, saw the visit as an opportunity to issue a practical mandate: If Bonnie was coming, it was time for the sisters to make an album. Not just an album, but "the album" – the musical inevitability that's been simmering since a 22-year-old Eleanor was protecting her curly headed 15-year-old sister at gigs in local bars. The collection, along with two covers – a song by their pal **Aaron Lee Tasjan** ("Big Heart Sick Mind" and "On the Wings of a Nightingale" (written by Paul McCartney for iconic siblings The Everly Brothers) – was produced by Chris Masterson and completes *Ghost Stories*, their debut album set for release on **January 21, 2022 on Red House Records**.

"We've had a lot of loss, a couple of dead ex-boyfriends, and a lot of friends that have passed on – and writing about the grief, especially working towards this record, there's been a lot to consider," Bonnie says.

The sisters' closeness and unconventional upbringing, not to mention their melodic sensibility and pure blood harmonies, create something truly special.

"We have all these things that make us us," Bonnie says. "Our mother was an opera singer; our father was a folk singer. When I heard Ian & Sylvia for the first time, I finally realized that song wasn't our parents. That's how we discovered music."

Trained to fly as girls by a father who was an accomplished Navy Air carrier pilot, they were exposed to amphibious planes, jets, props and all sorts of aviation possibilities. Consequently, The Whitmores see the world from an above-the-world perspective. Marveling at the whimsy that comes with flying, they also acknowledge that flight allows you to see things in larger ways and make connections most people miss.

Opening with the languidly sweeping "**Learn To Fly**," the lush power-pop feel buoys The Whitmores' dizzying close harmonies. Explaining the lessons absorbed from flying, it serves as a metaphor for coping with life without losing the beauty.

Laughing, Eleanor joins in. "In our family you sing, you play an instrument, and fly. I was practically born in an airplane. Our parents did aerobatics to try to induce labor with both of us and it really explains everything!"

They laugh now about their close bond, joking about the time they went through a sisterly "divorce," which Bonnie confesses was instigated by a "total lack of boundaries" towards her big sis. But their oddly beautiful, shared life experiences make *Ghost Stories* inevitable. Eleanor explains the friction then and now, "We're very much alike. It was part of the problem in the beginning, but now it's a strength."

Whether it's the bittersweet "**Friends We Leave Behind**," the Elite Hotel/ Luxury Liner Emmylou Harris-evoking "**The Ballad of Sissy & Porter**" or the closing "**Greek Tragedy**," with its addiction quicksand outcome, the echoes of people lost to the wages of misadventure permeates *Ghost*

Stories. Yet, even in the occasionally stark arrangements or dour topics, there's a shimmer that pulls you forward. Loss is to be endured, but not drowned in, The Whitmores suggest.

Pausing for a moment, Bonnie dials the songs in a little closer to their hearts. "The Ballad of Sissy and Porter' is pretty obviously about Chris Porter, who was a musician (and former boyfriend) who was killed in a tragic accident on tour. It's all the crazy stories he used to tell, while 'Greek Tragedy' is about Justin [Townes Earle, another great love of Bonnie's life].

"He was a star who burned out too quickly," Bonnie continues. "He was so much like his Dad, who paved the way. The answers were in front of him, but he had to make those mistakes for himself."

"Greek Tragedy," with its deep rush of emotions, draws heavily on The Beatles. Friend and Leonard Cohen/Tom Petty vet **Hattie Webb** guests on harp, offering a heavenly feel, while Chris Masterson's George Harrison-evoking electric guitar on the chorus is luxurious. The juxtaposition – that sky high view – merges great sadness with music that lifts the listener.

Whether their mother's lead in La Traviata, for the quiet storm post-facto obsession that builds in "**Superficial World**" or the steel guitar-stained "**By Design**," echoes of their influences ripple throughout Ghost Stories. You can hear early Chicks, with the reeling fiddle on the train wrecking "**Ricky**," and the fluidity makes these songs vast, but utterly Whitmore.

"We're both seasoned musicians," Eleanor offers. "We've made so many records on our own, for ourselves and with other artists. I'm classically trained. When we come together, we understand each other, because we have so much shared musical vocabulary."

That musical fluidity is as buoyant on Aaron Lee Tasjan's "**Big Heart, Sick Mind**." Their harmonies offer the Paul McCartney-written Everly Brothers' cover "**On The Wings Of A Nightingale**" a velvety pluck. Eleanor admits, "We did want to nod to the influence of sibling harmony. Will Rigby (dBs) had sent Chris and I the demo Paul McCartney had made for the Everlys." "In addition to McCartney's songwriting," Bonnie says, "his bass-playing was a huge influence on me."

Equally tricky, but no less compelling is how The Whitmores can slide into something as seemingly ordinary as a shuffle – and make it new. From the start of "Hurtin' for a Letdown," they're long on their Texas roots with a gust of fun through the track.

The title track marks the other end of the spectrum. Deeply serious, with a violin line inspired by the death of Elijah McClain, the sisters decided to widen their reach to honor all people of color killed in senseless interactions with police. "**Ghost Stories**" is a modern murder ballad," Eleanor continues. "We pulled the lens back where we could really take it all in and see all the marginalized people."

Ultimately, Ghosts Stories' cathartic songs embrace the beauty and the experience of living. What came from lockdown and shared experiences –hiking the Grand Canyon at 5, playing bars at 15 or just embracing the beauty of living – is an album to take you places and make you feel so alive.

"Music should move people," Eleanor affirms. "Or at least cause some kind of reaction. Sometimes it's comforting, or you can rock out! I've always liked Woody Guthrie's way of looking at it: "Music is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."

## **TRACK LISTING**

1. Learn to Fly
2. The Ballad of Sissy and Porter
3. Friends We Leave Behind
4. Hurtin' For a Letdown
5. Superficial World of Love
6. Big Heart Sick Mind
7. Ghost Stories
8. Ricky

9. By Design
10. On the Wings of a Nightengale
11. Greek Tragedy

**The Whitmore Sisters will support The Mastersons on their European tour in early 2022:**

Jan 26: Oldenzaal, NL - Cobblestone  
Jan 28: Zaandam, NL - Bullekerk  
Jan 29: Eindhoven, NL - 't Rozenknopje  
Jan 30: Arnhem, NL - Luxor Live  
Feb 1: Winchester, UK - The Railway Inn  
Feb 2: Birmingham, UK - Kitchen Garden  
Feb 3: Nottingham, UK - Bodega  
Feb 5: Scarborough, UK - The Old Parcels Office  
Feb 7: London, UK - O2 Academy  
Feb 9: Bilbao, ESP - Kafe Antzokia, Kutxa Beltza  
Feb 10: Zaragoza, ESP - Rock & Blues Café  
Feb 11: Valencia, ESP - Loco Club  
Feb 12: Madrid, ESP - El Sol  
Feb 13: Santander, ESP - El Almacén de Little Bobby

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