

CHRIS & MEREDITH THOMPSON

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Beacons of Light

By Jim Vickers

Chris and Meredith Thompson return to Stone Soup for a night of folk spiritual music.

Chris and Meredith Thompson, identical twins who grew up on Providence's east side in America, also home to the original Stone Soup Coffeehouse where they played their first show in 1992, have embraced a life of spiritually-based acoustic music. Though granddaughters of a Baptist minister, recalling African-American spirituals as their first musical experience, Chris distanced her songwriting and artistic mission from Evangelicalism. Rather her faith in song comes from an open spirituality and a way of being open in the world. "The way I was raised was that you lived by the golden rule," Chris says. "You treat people with kindness."

Its not that the Thompsons are ardent Christians either, or any other religion. They're folk singers drawn to the light and reflecting an inherent goodness through song and deed.

Chris for example played a tsunami benefit Saturday in Beverly Mass, while Meredith cared for her two month old son Carter.

Notable to Rhode Islanders, the twins performed a handful of spiritual s including "Amazing Grace" and Chris's original "Hallelujah" on a bill that included Pete Seeger, Paul Geremia and many others in the First Baptist church last March to benefit Stone Soup founder Joyce Katzberg.

And in the moment of singing "Hallelujah" - words grown from faith and heat, performed to help another human being- the completeness of lives coupled at birth, and since, shown brilliant in a holy place.

Since high school the sisters have sung folk, gospel and African American spirituals at open mics, coffeehouses and toured the folk circuit after graduating from Cornell together. They've been repeat performers at Clearwater revival, Hudson NY, and the Falcon Ridge folk festival, and grace[d] the stage of Carnegie Hall [in Pittsburgh, PA]. But always, audiences have requested the spirituals the pairs voices join effortlessly in, in a harmony unique to siblings. Voices that weave intertwine and emerge individually. The tradition that resonates a common experience in stories of hope and history.

From Live, the pairs sixth /CD, Chris links the fall of the Old Man of the mountain, in a namesake song, that metaphorically embodies the faith put in things that we believe will never change. But with time, all things must pass, and we watch parents grow old and children, in turn, must be strong for them.

Still, these songs of hope ad grace are not the entirety of the Thompson's repertoire. Chris plays riff-driven guitar, and Meredith plays authentic Latin rhythms on congas and adds flute to a wealth of straightforward folk. But, as Meredith says, "there is something about the faith and hope in church music that's uplifting. There's a resonance in that music.

Both sisters speak about the goodness, not only in holy places, but in the hearts of people around them, calling them "beacons of lights.

The final verse of hallelujah brings their music and heart full circle as they sing of good people:

All around me, there were angels speaking softly almost like song.

I recognized all of their faces. You were wit me all along.

Hallelujah, Hallelujah. See that shining evermore? In a world that's filled with darkness, it's the light I will lean towards.