

Connie Converse – How Sad How Lovely (2009)

Written by bluelover

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1. *Talkin' Like You (Two Tall Mountains)* 2. *Johnny's Brother* 3. *Roving Woman* 4. *Down This Road* 5. *The Clover Saloon* 6. *John Brady* 7. *We Lived Alone* 8. *Playboy of the Western World* 9. *Unknown (A Little Louder, Love)* 10. *One by One* 11. *Father Neptune* 12. *Man in the Sky* 13. *Empty Pocket Waltz* 14. *Honeybee* 15. *There Is a Vine* 16. *How Sad, How Lovely* 17. *Trouble* 18. *I Have Considered the Lillies*

Connie Converse was the quintessential musical enigma – an artists before her time, forgotten, and disappeared without a trace over 35 years ago. If you stripped away the sharp literary mind, the precision of the songcraft, the bare honesty of her humble recordings, you would still be left with an unanswerable question: Where did she go? Why did she pack her belongings into a car, write goodbye letters to her friends and family, and vanish?

Around 1949, Elizabeth “Connie” Converse dropped out of Mt. Holyoke College and moved to New York City to make her way as a musician. Over the course of the next decade, she wrote and recorded a body of truly unique, plaintive, and haunting work. Some songs she recorded herself in her Greenwich Village apartment, others were recorded by friends enamored of her music, but almost none ever reached an audience wider than, as she once put it, “dozens of people all over the world.” By the early 1960’s, despondent over the limited commercial success of her music, she decided to leave New York for Ann Arbor where, in 1974, Connie wrote a series of goodbye letters to friends and family, packed up her Volkswagen and disappeared. She has not been heard from since.

At first listen, Connie’s music seems to keep close company with the female folk artists who were her contemporaries. The knack for plaintive storytelling shares much with Peggy Seeger and Susan Reed. Reed knew Connie’s music well, and performed a set of her songs in 1961 at the Kaufmann Concert Hall in New York. But Connie’s music stands out from that of the

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American folk revival of the 1950's. Her fluid and disarmingly intelligent poetry reflects an urban perspective, that of a new New Yorker becoming disenchanted by the bucolic tropes of folk music. She is at once a maverick and a romantic, intellectual and spiritual, a staunch independent and a tender, pining lover. --- squirrelthing.com

"How Sad, How Lovely" by Connie Converse is a collection of songs written around the 1950's, and just recently discovered and restored. Connie Converse disappeared in 1974, and left behind an impressive catalog that wouldn't be heard for another 35 years. This is a fraction of that catalog.

Converse's songs sometimes transcend in writing past the constraints typically heard in songs of the era. While many songs open up as traditional folk, and follow along the "storyteller" formula, others seem to play with words, self depreciate, and hint on ironies found in her own stories. The wordy laid back feel of "Playboy of the Western World" is a good example of how Converse was a little ahead of her time. "The Man in the Sky" seems to channel Johnny Cash just a bit, and is even sang in a lower register. --- Michael Rickert, examiner.com

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