

Bill & Ben

William Coulter & Benjamin Verdery
guitars

Their space is made of strings – acoustic strings. Strings have their own kind of chemistry, and steel and nylon played together have their own subtle dynamic and exchange. They talk back and forth, like old friends who don't get together as often as they'd like to.

Something original is going on. Part of it is the mix of strings themselves - one guitar strung with steel, another strung with nylon. We seldom hear this. Ben Verdery says that he tried it once before, in a couple of tunes recorded years back with Leo Kottke. It makes a very pleasing mix of textures, like silk laid next to satin. One helps to define the other.

But the more important chemistry is what the performers release in one another as they play. Bill Coulter and Ben Verdery have found a unique and energizing partnership. They first met back in 1984, when Ben was on a west coast tour and performing at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Bill, who had recently moved to the region, saw it announced in the local paper. At the time he didn't know much about Ben Verdery. "The concert just sounded interesting," he said. "So I went, and with the first piece I fell in love with this guy's music." Afterward he introduced himself. They started talking and quickly found that they had a lot in common. Ben needed a ride down the hill to his hotel. They had a few beers and kept talking – two young guys who shared a passion for the guitar. Though they lived on opposite sides of the continent, they stayed in touch and performed together for the first time in 1990. Bill had been exploring Celtic music and was putting an album together. He invited Ben to join him on one of the tunes. Three years later they teamed up for two more tunes on another of Coulter's CD's, and afterward started talking, in a general way, about doing more together. It had become a musical



relationship they both savor, easy and fluid, with lots of agreement on how arrangements should go and how best to manage such matters as intonation and improvisation, to release the instrument's full range of feeling.



While listening to Bill & Ben's recordings (*Song for our Ancestors* and *Happy Here*) one will note that most of the tunes have been around for a while, some for centuries. There are family lines, and there are musical lines. Many ancestries and influences converge in these recordings – from Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, Africa, and Tibet, together with works written by Bill, Ben, Bach, Lennon and Bruce.

What we get from Bill & Ben is a guitar performance at its most intimate. There is heart here and a meditative quality. Each musician goes inward to his still center, in order to come outward with a shared sound that is masterful yet vulnerable.

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William Coulter

William Coulter has been performing and recording traditional music for over 20 years. His most recent recording, *The Road Home*, is a critically acclaimed solo project on the Gourd Music label. In 2005 he was awarded a Grammy for his contribution to *The Pink Guitar*, a collection of solo guitar arrangements of the music of Henry Mancini.

Musical collaborations have been a mainstay of his career and have included many tours and recordings. *Song for Our Ancestors*, with classical guitar virtuoso Benjamin Verdery, *Time to Sail* and *One Sweet Kiss*, with Kerry-born Irish singer Ellis Kennedy, *Simple Gifts - Music of the Shakers*, with cellist Barry Phillips, *Emma's Waltz* with mountain dulcimer-guru Neal Hellman, and *Celtic Requiem*, with Irish singer Mary McLaughlin.



Since 1997, he has acted as musical director and toured nationally with *A Celtic Christmas*, a popular holiday show featuring the native Irish story telling of Limerick-born Tomaseen Foley. Going back to the 80's finds William playing with *Isle of Skye and Orison* - followed by tours with *The Coulter/Phillips Ensemble*, featuring Barry and Shelley Phillips and Deby Benton Grosjean. Musical travels have taken him to places far and wide including Taiwan, England, Portugal, New York, Nova Scotia, Toronto, Oregon, Hawaii and even an occasional gig in his home town of Santa Cruz, CA.

As a teacher William maintains a classical guitar studio at the University of California at Santa Cruz, holds regular 'DADGAD Days,' and is busy in the summer at camps such as the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop, The National Guitar Workshop, Chris Norman's Boxwood Flute Camp, and the Rocky Mt. Fiddle Camp. His book of transcriptions *Celtic Crossing*, is published by Mel Bay and includes all of the music from his Gourd Music recording of the same name. Production credits include recordings for Windham Hill Records and Gourd Music and his recordings have appeared on compilations produced by the Narada label and Hearts of Space. William earned his BA in music from UC Santa Cruz and a Master of Music degree from the San Francisco Conservatory. During his classical studies he was always drawn to traditional Irish and American folk music. This led to a second Master's degree from UCSC, earned in 1994, in ethnomusicology with an emphasis on traditional Irish music, language and song.

Upcoming projects include *Jefferson's Fiddle - Music from the Time of Thomas Jefferson* and a new book of transcriptions and guitar instruction featuring his most requested arrangements.

www.gamisimonds.com
www.williamcoulter.com

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Benjamin Verdery

Described as "iconoclastic" and "inventive" by The New York Times and "one of the classical guitar world's most foremost personalities," by Classical Guitar Magazine, Benjamin Verdery enjoys an innovative and eclectic musical career.

Since his 1980 New York debut with his wife, flutist Rie Schmidt, Benjamin has performed throughout Europe, Asia and North America and has recorded and performed with such diverse artists as Leo Kottke, Paco Peña, Andy Summers and John Williams.

Benjamin has released over 15 albums, his most recent being: *Happy Here* with William Coulter and *Branches* with works by J.S. Bach, Strauss, Jimi Hendrix, Mozart and the traditional *Amazing Grace*. His recording, *Start Now*, won the 2005 Classical Recording Foundation Award. Other recordings of note include *Some Towns & Cities* which won the 1992 Guitar Player Magazine Best Classical Guitar Recording and his collaborations with John Williams (*John Williams Plays Vivaldi*) and Andy Summers (*First you Build A Cloud*).

A prolific composer, many of Benjamin Verdery's compositions have been performed, recorded and published over the years. Most recently Pensacola College (FL) commissioned a work for guitar orchestra commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Guitar Program (premiere October 13, 2012), and the New York State Council on the Arts commissioned a work for koto and guitar. Other recent compositions include the 92nd St Y commissioned piece, *What He Said*, for the Assad Duo; *Now and Ever* for David Russell and *Peace, Love and Guitars* for John Williams and John Etheridge.

In addition to his performance tours, recording and teaching Benjamin Verdery is chair of the guitar department at the [Yale University School of Music](http://www.yale.edu/schoolofmusic) and the Yale Guitar Extravaganza, Artistic Director of the [92nd St Y's](http://www.92ndstys.com) (New York City) Art of the Guitar series and is an honorary board member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas, Inc. Each summer Benjamin holds his Annual International Master Class on the Island of Maui (Hawaii).

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