

FRKWYS VOL. 11

Steve Gunn & Mike Cooper - *Cantos de Lisboa*

For the the eleventh volume of **FRKWYS**, an unrestricted series pairing contemporary artists with their influential predecessors, gifted guitar squire **Steve Gunn** meets roving, radiating legend **Mike Cooper** in Lisbon, Portugal.

Sharing their vision over lengthy living room guitar sessions and evenings of cold wine in Fado taverns, Gunn and Cooper created *Cantos de Lisboa*, an album with variable vernacular shades and musical forms from Portugal's antiquity.

Cantos means "corner" in Portuguese, as well as "chant" or "song" (this latter meaning evolved from the Latin antecedent referring to stanzas of verse in poetry). For two artists whose roots lie in the country blues and its subverted offshoots, the proverbial "corner" is actually home, the undisturbed spot where music can flourish.

A tranquil interlude for these two travellers to create off-guard improvisations in their shared style of deconstructed guitar music, *Cantos de Lisboa* is a curious detail in the periphery of their snapshot of Portugal.

In his fifty-year-plus career, Cooper's global ventures have transported his music to exotic locales parallel to Lisbon. 2004's *Rayon Hula* musically translated the patterned flora of aloha shirts (Cooper's signature garment) as looped samples of famed Hawaiian vibraphone player **Arthur Lyman** for an avant vivified form of exotica.

Rayon Hula signaled Cooper's vital re-emergence as a dexterous alchemist of slide guitar. Cooper's discography is colored with similar instances of casually conceptual, improvisatory guitar music, including his 1970 masterpiece *Trout Steel* (an album Gunn recalls in *Cantos de Lisboa*'s liner notes as shaping his own ambitions and music).

For his part, Gunn's path to Portugal was compelled by his kinship to Cooper and his ilk's experimentation with guitar-picked country blues and 70s British folk. Gunn's extracurricular immersion in free jazz and psychedelia, no doubt influenced by his Philadelphia upbringing and surroundings, ensures his playing never grits or grids and always soars to ecstatic heights.

These musical emblems were gracefully memorialized on Gunn's celebrated *Time Off* (Paradise of Bachelors, 2013) and across a substantial catalog of solo, duo and ensemble work that resembles that of a veteran player more than a young guitar slinger.

On *Cantos de Lisboa*, Gunn and Cooper take emotive cues from Fado, the regional music of Portugal, which is in close plaintive spirit to the blues. A melancholy seeps into the music, while steering a wide berth from any bummer notes or pastiche. Cooper's sparse effects toolkit and stately, gliding cadences are nimbly employed, while Gunn's ashen voice and steady strum lend an intensely organic feel to the album's improvisatory portraits.

The latter half of *Cantos de Lisboa* echoes the "saudade" theme as referenced in the blissful opening track, Cooper's howl spiriting the Portuguese word that translates roughly into "loss" or "longing." Saudade is said to be the core feature of Fado music. In *Cantos de Lisboa*, Saudade becomes a spirit inhabiting the album's corners, but never disrupting the musicians' collaborative evocations.

In the hands of these two limitless guitarists, *Cantos de Lisboa* convenes in an abstract, almost field recorded take on lap-steel and American Primitive guitar styles. For the brief idyll, Gunn and Cooper's collaboration is remarkably rich, marking their passage through Portugal not just as a time to revel in an ancient city, but a time for focused collaboration and creative consonance.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Hometown: Reading, UK and New York, NY
- Key Markets: New York, London, Portland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Austin
- RIYL: Robbie Basho, Christian Marclay, Michael Chapman, Fred Frith
- Gifted guitar squire **Steve Gunn** meets roving, radiating legend **Mike Cooper** in Portugal for the latest intergenerational collaboration in RVNG Intl.'s FRKWYS series
- Mike Cooper is a master of lap-steel and acoustic guitar with 45+ years of recorded material
- An off / on again member of **Kurt Vile's** band **The Violators**, Steve Gunn has made a name for himself since 2009's masterpiece, *Boerum Palace*
- FRKWYS Vol. 11 inaugurates a new aesthetic for the collaboration series designed by Will Work For Good



STEVE GUNN & MIKE COOPER *Cantos de Lisboa*



FRKWYS 

11

TRACK LISTING

- 01 *Saudade Do Santos-o-Velho*
- 02 *Pena Panorama*
- 03 *Song For Charlie*
- 04 *Pony Blues*
- 05 *The Enchanted Moura*
- 06 *Lampedusa 2013*
- 07 *Saramago*

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