

California Guitar Trio – Echoes (2008)

Written by bluesever

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01. *The Cruel Sea* [play](#) 02. *Music For A Found Harmonium* [play](#) 03. *Unmei* 04. *Echoes* 05. *Tubular Bells* 06. *Pastorale* 07. *Bohemian Rhapsody* 08. *and I Khow* 09. *Preedird*

Personnel:

Bonnie "Prince" Billy (vocals); Jamie Masefield (mandolin); Tom Griesgraber (Chapman stick); Kevin Ratterman (shaker, tambourine); Pamela Kurstin (Theremin).

The California Guitar Trio have been plying their formula for over a decade now: applying their combined virtuosity to a few originals, some classical pieces, some surf music, and the occasionally kitschy cover. For *Echoes*, they've left out the originals and added a few new wrinkles. The album begins, sounding like just about any California Guitar Trio release, but the ears perk up a bit when electric guitar enters during Beethoven's *Unmei*. "*Echoes*" has still more electric guitar along with additional keys, bass, and theremin (there are a number of guest spots on the album, including past cohort Tony Levin). "*Echoes*" is nicely done, but "*Tubular Bells*" comes off even better since the composition itself really lends itself to the CGT modus operandi. "*Bohemian Rhapsody*" might seem like an odd choice, but their instrumental arrangement makes it sound more like it came from the pen of Beethoven than Freddie Mercury (although somebody nails Brian May's solo). Then things sort of veer off the normal course for a CGT album. The last two tracks bring in Bonnie "Prince" Billy (aka Will Oldham) on vocals for a pair of covers: the folksy "*And I Know*" (originally performed by Switzerland's Krokodil) and "*Free Bird*" (the mere thought of which might produce audible groans from some listeners). Actually, "*Free Bird*" comes off better than it ought to, with a bit of a reggae lilt and some dubby echo for the first part before going full electric for the coda. The vocal tracks may not appeal to all their fans (and can be programmed out anyway, if need be), but *Echoes* is another solid offering that manages to expand the sound of the California Guitar Trio while remaining very true to it at the same time. --- Sean Westergaard

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