

Family, by Thompson

reviewed by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [April 15, 2015](#) issue

In Review



Family

Thompson

Fantasy

The story of *Family* begins with the unlikely reunion of a married couple who once made remarkable music together but then didn't speak to each other for years.

Richard Thompson is one of the world's great guitar players, with sly songwriting

skills and a sharp British baritone to match. Linda Thompson is a revered vocalist from the same folk-rock movement that launched Richard, her ex-husband. Together they recorded *Shoot Out the Lights*, the acclaimed 1982 album that chronicles their acrimonious split as much as it shows a duo at a peak of their creative powers.

They're together again, at least in the studio. And every note of *Family* is performed by the family—not just Richard and Linda but also a brood of musical children, extended family, and even one grandchild. The project may be a bit disjointed, but it's also intimate and musically engaging, with many of the songs fit for the clan's next bonfire.

Family is produced by Richard and Linda's son Teddy, himself an established musician, and he spells out his dilemma on the opener and title track: "My father is one the greats to ever step on a stage / My mother has the most beautiful voice in the world / And I am betwixt and between / Sean Lennon, you know what I mean." This could sound mawkish but it doesn't, given the stripped-bare, bittersweet musical setting.

The genetic lines sometimes blur. Grandson Zak Hobbs, 17, sings a lot like Uncle Teddy on "Root So Bitter," and the teenager plays guitar with panache and flash. Perhaps he takes lessons from Grandpa Richard, who plays hurdy-gurdy on the track:

Linda cowrites with Hobbs and sings lead on "Bonny Boys," which only reveals its subject near the end: a dying mother bidding farewell to her children. She doesn't so much grab the listener's heartstrings as brush them with sublime strokes.

As for the inevitable question, Richard and Linda don't appear in any duets or side-by-side in any sense, though she lends her backing vocals to "That's Enough." Richard's song of deep disillusionment shuffles along with a sing-along melody; he's known for framing such paradoxes in his solo work. He doesn't play the tasty slide guitar; that's James Walbourne, husband to Richard and Linda's youngest daughter, Kami.

Exuding warmth and lacking any thematic gimmickry, *Family* delivers on its unique conceit. It isn't entirely smooth going, but what family reunion is?