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Thursday, October 15, 2020 www.donegalive.ie Your **Essential Guide** to what's happening in Donegal

From Chapel Street to Somerville



Connie Duffy talks to singer-songwriter Finbarr Doherty about his new CD

Chapel Street to Somerville ... there's something about a title that grabs your attention and when you find out it is Finbarr Doherty, that's an even bigger bonus.

The singer-songwriter from Carndonagh has just released a new CD, called, would you believe, Chapel Street to Somerville and it features a collection of 21 songs conceived and recorded in both Ireland and the USA.

Spanning 25 years, it has journeyed from four-track to hard drives, across the Atlantic and back. It was recorded in bedrooms, backrooms, boxrooms and lofts - from hot humid Boston summers to damp winter nights in Donegal.

The album was recorded in Boston and Carndonagh, with a number of musicians including Campbell Owens (Aztec Camera, Lloyd Cole) on bass, and with Liam Bradley on drums - he has played with Van Morrison and Ronan Keating.

Also on the album are drummers Gary Raymond and Boston-based Julie Polvinen.

Finbarr's earliest memories were spent listening to his dad Willie's (saddler) old vinyl records of Al Jolson, Louis Armstrong and Bing Crosby as well as all the Broadway musicals and westerns of that era.

"He had that chilled out wisdom that pipe smokers seemed to have," jokes Finbarr.

"Music always reverberated

around the house, from dad singing to records of Al Jolson, Gilbert and Sullivan, musicals Louis Armstrong, and old western tunes.

"From as earliest memory, we were always encouraged to sing. Our dad used to have us perform on the what was known as the Slipper Box! That was our first stage.

"From there I was involved in local bands, with neighbours and friends. Before wall to wall radio, I remember hearing Bob Dylan on Radio Caroline as the signal faded in and out. Even though it wasn't clear reception, I knew there was something there that need further exploration.

"Realising my talents were not in football, music filled the void and it's been the soundtrack of my life ever since. With my next door neighbours, playing my fathers guitar which cost £8, I know that this was what I had to do. Don't think I had a choice," he said.

Teenage years were spent forming bands such as Model T and Big Deal with friends and trying to figure out the chords of songs while also commandeering his parents' front room to set up a makeshift recording studio with an old four-track 'Teac' cassette recording studio.

"In our teens we formed a band, John Crumlish and Paul Kearney, and could be heard miles away, as we thumped out an old blues song, that could go on for half a day.

"Maybe this was a form of therapy, it certainly got us through. Our first garage

Hats off to: Finbarr Doherty who has just released a new CD this week entitled Chapel Street to Somerville



band, great memories.

"I later moved from garage to bars with bands and played covers and began experimenting with song-writing.

"Maybe it was our lack of musicianship that forced us into songwriting and creating our own chords. Three chords and the truth!"

The late 80s saw Finbarr performing with 33rd Hurricane - an Inishowen band whose single Shotgun Blast received regular national airplay on radio and TV.

"At this stage it was all original music. It was always scribbling notes and taping ideas for songs, and this DIY ethos has continued to this day.

"I now work mainly in my home studio, whilst the technology has advanced its still the same process of getting to the song. From idea to song."

In the 90s, Finbarr spent seven years living in Boston, working and playing the coffee houses and bars

around the Massachusetts and New York areas.

His songs appeared on a compilation album One Night in Cambridge and he released an EP Garbage, Drama, Fantasy.

In 2001 Finbarr returned to Ireland and went on to release two solo albums, Skyscrapers and Across the Water.

The latter was inspired by the book The Last of the Name, the memories of Clonmany storyteller Charles McGlinchey. The

album also was reinterpreted into a stage production.

Finbarr has many and varied musical influences.

"As mentioned a key influence was Bob Dylan. Others include Tom Waits, Neil Young, Van Morrison and The Rolling Stones. But also I liked a wide range of music from Shane McGowan, Nick Cave, to Nina Simone."

This current release, as the title suggests, started many years ago in Chapel

Street, Carndonagh.

The songs span 25 years, and are drawn from cassettes, hard drives and scribbled ideas and lyrics over the years, many incoherent, into this product!

Chapel Street to Somerville is an excellent offering and one he should be proud of.

It's available now on CD and download at finbarrmusic.com. It can also be purchased in Doherty's (Fintan's) Carndonagh, and at Cool Discs in Derry.

The first single, Close Encounters, is out now - you can watch it on YouTube or listen on Spotify and the usual platforms.

Finbarr has worked as guitar teacher for the past number of years.

Through this he has met up with some interesting young people with fresh takes on old themes, as well as them introducing him to their musical influences. "Always learning," he says.



Stairway to Carndonagh: Singer-songwriter Finbarr Doherty