

FINTAN McHUGH'S STARDUST AND BONE

Stardust and Bone is the second album from Dublin born, Germany based, Irish singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Fintan McHugh. Grainne McCool finds out more for IMM.



Growing up with a musical Derry father, McHugh was never going to be a stranger to traditional music. He told me “Irish traditional music was ever present in my home and upbringing. My father is an uilleann piper who played in a variety of bands and my mother plays Baroque music and Irish tunes on the fiddle and viola. The defining moment which really sparked off a motivation to actually learn to sing Irish traditional songs was when I heard Mícheál Ó Domhnaill sing *Casadh an tSugain*.”

Dublin where he lived before moving abroad is a hive of Irish culture and its music, so why has he made Germany his home?

“My girlfriend, myself and our first son lived in Belgium at the time for about one and half years before we moved to Germany. An opportunity arose to head to Hamburg close to her brother’s family. We’ve been here now for three years and have three boys. Whenever I’m not making money somewhere I’m pretty busy minding the kids at home.”

Stardust and Bone is McHugh’s second album. In 2016 he released his debut *Wait Till the Clouds Roll By*, a collection reminiscent of the 60’s and 70’s. This recent work is written by himself and explores all things personal. It’s very raw and showcases his unique vocal ability alongside exquisite guitar playing. He says of this album: “*Stardust and Bone* is a collection of 11 songs, which I have written over the past 10 years or so. It was a very exciting and daring move but a comfortable one too. It felt like the right way to go. Musically it allowed all kinds of colours and influences of different genres to seep into the songs. Hints of the blues, flamenco, Indian or classical music. Irish traditional music is there of course.”

Fintan tells me about his live gigs. “People come up to me after gigs sometimes in a very emotional state and tell me about whatever was going on inside of them during the gig. One guy told me how he just

realised the pressure he had been under for 5 years working on a project and all that turmoil had surged and eased off while listening to the gig. Some say they don’t need to go out and get drunk now, they’re already high. For others it’s heavier and they mourn a loss and cry. Another time after the first few songs of a gig in Switzerland an ex couple ended up having a big row backstage. They were holding grudges for years and began splashing all their emotions out into the open and reconciled just before the gig was over. After the show an exhausted but very relieved man thanked me for this and said it was because of the music I had played. I keep these touching stories with me and it’s deeply satisfying to know that such things can happen through or because of my music.

Music can resonate in unexpected ways and bring all kinds of changes about. I find that absolutely fascinating and awe-inspiring whenever it happens. So I hope that somehow a kind of wild and free space is created at a gig or while listening to the album which allows old wounds to heal and the mind to move and dream in required and unprecedented ways.”

Fintan is candid about his song writing process “I’ve never sat down with an aim to write songs. They simply appear. I start by playing an instrument or sing or write down words. I heard an interesting quote on finishing work by the painter Paul Gardner saying: *A painting is never finished - it simply stops in interesting places*. I imagine that goes for any piece of art. Creativity never stops. I just do it whenever it urges me to out some intrinsic necessity. It’s a mystery which is really beyond me.”

I asked him where the title of the album came from. “It was taken from the last line of the title track: *We all come once and at once we fall to stardust and bone*... It only became clear on the day of the photo shoot with Fabian Fornalski that *Stardust and Bone* would be the title of my new album. We took photos the whole day all over Berlin. As the day went on, I started realising that *Stardust and Bone* somehow embraced and bound the whole collection of songs.”

How was the Covid-19 impacting him? “My April tour in Ireland was cancelled as well as two gigs over here in Germany. On this side I also teach circus for kids. That has fallen away too. For the time being we’re doing just fine as a family in these peculiar times. It’s actually kind of like holidays but just spending your time inside the house most of the time.”

What does the future now hold for Fintan McHugh? “I hope I’ll be fortunate enough to record again. I love the buzz of creating new songs,

“We all come once and at once we fall to stardust and bone...”

recording them in a studio and bringing them to an audience on stage. Moving and shaping. Maybe if it would happen with a band next time that would be beautiful!”

Find out more at Fintan’s website: www.fintanmchugh.com

