

The Gloaming

Martin Hayes, Iarla O'Lionaird, Caoimhin O'Raghallaigh, Dennis Cahill, Thomas Bartlett



It's too late to stop now. What began as an experiment has turned into something truly compelling, enthralling and thrilling. Something which never fails to lift the heart or lift a roof. Something which connects you to old souls and wild ways and fierce times. Something which certainly didn't exist before, but which often feels as if it has been part and parcel of the furniture forever.

In many ways, The Gloaming began with a question: what would happen if you amplified and enhanced traditional Irish music's rich, melancholic, soulful tones with modern hues of jazz, contemporary classical and experimental music? In many ways, the musicians who started out on this odyssey are still answering that question every night they go onstage to play another sold-out show in some of the most prestigious concert halls around the world. It's an answer without a full stop in sight.

The Gloaming brings together five musical masters. Steeped in traditional Irish music since birth, fiddlers Martin Hayes and Caoimhin Ó Raghallaigh and sean-nós singer Iarla Ó Lionáird are joined by New York pianist Thomas Bartlett (Doveman), and Chicago-born guitarist Dennis Cahill.

The backgrounds of The Gloaming's three Irish members show the strength, diversity, history and colour of the traditional music ecosystem. Hayes hails from County Clare, where a slow, contemplative, and melancholic sweep of fiddle music holds sway amongst its musicians. A move to America burnished his sound with new idioms, ranging from Arvo Pärt to Sigur Ros. Still very much an East Clare fiddler, Hayes has brought this age-old sound into a modern setting without losing any of its essence.

Hayes's fellow fiddler is Dublin-born Ó Raghallaigh, whose head was turned by minimal, experimental sounds. His ability to mine the space and texture between the notes with his customized fiddle, part Norwegian Hardanger and part viola d'amore, has produced a mesmerising body of groundbreaking solo and collaborative work. As a player, Ó Raghallaigh is fearless and peerless when it comes to following a musical hunch or nudge across the fields and hills.

Ó Lionáird hails from West Cork, where sean-nós singing - solo singing unaccompanied by any instrument - is the lingua franca. Passed down the generations like a field with road footage, the songs cover a multitude of material: historical events, love poems or bittersweet accounts of loss and emigration, and, of course, songs about drinking and devilment. An exponent of this dark, passionate, and ancient art, Ó Lionáird has taken a unique, indelibly Irish voice and lyrics drawn from Irish literature into new terrain. He has recorded a number of albums for Real World Records and became a choice collaborator for composers like Nico Muhly, Gavin Bryars, and Donnacha Dennehy.

The cast of The Gloaming has found new depth and width with the addition of guitarist Cahill, an American from Dingle, County Kerry stock, and producer / pianist Bartlett, who has worked with Antony and the Johnsons, Sufjan Stevens, The National and many more. With Cahill and Bartlett's musical dexterity and shaping, The Gloaming's reels and jigs attain new and exhilarating heights. It's a bold and brave combination that creates the distinctive, bracing sound of music then and now, perfectly in tune.

The Gloaming's debut album was widely considered as one of the finest recordings of 2014, featuring on many year-end best lists including Mojo, NPR Music and the Irish Times and selected by The Guardian as The One Album You Should Hear This Week. It won a BBC Radio 2 Folk Award in the U.K. and the prestigious Choice Music Prize for Album of the Year in Ireland.

The band's second album "2" was released in February 2016. Recorded over one inspired week at Real World Studios, "2" again received a ticker-tape parade of positive reviews ("an exquisite album from a virtuoso band": The Guardian). At year's end, there were more accolades for the mantelpiece from such sources as The Irish Times (Best Traditional Album), The Daily Telegraph (Best Folk Music) and The Irish Independent ("the coolest supergroup since the Million Dollar Quartet").

In the last number of years, the band have truly become a live force to be reckoned with. They have played an annual run of sold-out shows at Dublin's National Concert Hall, each series selling out quicker than the previous one and faster than new shows can be added. Away from home, their international touring schedule has been equally impressive, including such notable nights out as the Ceiliúradh at London's Royal Albert Hall (a celebration of the Irish president's first-ever state visit to Britain), Sydney's Opera House, New York's Lincoln Center, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Mexico City's Teatro de la Ciudad and Philharmonie de Paris.

In March, the band performed seven sold-out shows at Dublin's National Concert Hall, their only live appearances of 2018. To mark this occasion, they release "Live at the NCH", a live album recorded at the venue which has become their home from home.

To put "Live at NCH" together Bartlett, the band's producer, sifted through two years of performances and settled on six tracks: "The Booley House", "Cucanandy", "The Sailor's Bonnet", "The Pilgrim's Song", "The Rolling Wave" and "Fáinleog". Using the studio recordings only as points of departure, these performances stretch out and roam in unexpected new directions, incorporating new tunes and rearranging old

ones, filled with the excitement and delight of five master musicians coming together as one.

The album was released to universal acclaim by Real World on 2 March 2018 .

Jim Carroll, April 2018

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