

Clean and Sober

Darryl Hunt of the Pogues



Darryl Hunt, the Pogues.

Darryl?
 "Yeah, where are you phoning from?"
 Dunedin.
 "Oh my God, right down there. I remember New Zealand very clearly, especially the little train we took from Christchurch to Dunedin, it was great. The scenery was amazing but the nightlife was a bit dull. Some of my family are from New Zealand — my grandfather on my mother's side was from Wellington. They were one of the first families to found Wellington and there's a park there named after the family."

A curious tale of reverse migration prompted by Darryl Hunt's reminiscence of the tour with the

Pogues at the beginning of last year. Their night at Sammy's in Dunedin was a memorable enough mix of reels, ballads and revelry that never quite reached the class that you'd expect from a band consistently touted as one of Britannia's finest.

No matter, Hunt is on the phone to talk about new Pogueery, *Peace And Love*, just a couple of weeks before the band embarks on an American tour — the first 10 days of which is a Californian jaunt with Bob Dylan.

"He'd asked us several times," Hunt explains. "He asked us earlier in the year to do his European tour but we couldn't fit it in. Obviously it would be silly to turn a person like that down."

He must see you as kindred spirits since he wants the band's support so much?

"Yeah, maybe we remind him of

what he used to sound like before he got involved with all these idiots. He's gone to seed so maybe we'll shake him up a bit. He's surrounded himself with so many backing bands that themselves have been around too long to give his stuff new impetus. Whereas people like Van

Morrison or Lou Reed always come up with something new."

The Pogues' fourth album *Peace And Love* was released a couple of months ago and it's not up to scratch. There are too many weak songs, too many strands of influences and styles

that aren't successfully tied down by the band or given the required energy by producer Lillywhite.

"We're all happy with it. It's had a bit of flak in the UK but it's just different from the previous three. It's subtler, not so up-front, so people will get into it slowly, so this one might be more enduring."

"In the UK you're worn like a badge for so long and then they drop you, but fortunately we've got a loyal fan following here. Some of the press took the attitude that 'aw, they've been around long enough, let's give them a dig.'"

"We did stretch ourselves a bit as we wrote all of the songs for the first time and we put more tracks on the album than normal. We just decide what we have when we go to record and the stuff that works out best as we record is the stuff that we put on the album. We just let the songs evolve."

I see that you helped write one of the album's more engaging songs — 'Blue Heaven'.

"Yeah, I wanted to write something with a Caribbean sound so Phil and I came up with that. I didn't expect it to go on the record, I thought it might've been a B-side, but it worked out better in the studio than I thought. I prefer to leave the

writing to Sean, the master, who must be one of the best lyric writers around today."

The album is dedicated to those who died at the Hillsborough Football Ground. Did that tragedy touch the band in a more personal way that it touched Britain and the world as a whole?

"I was there. I'm a Nottingham Forest fan and I've seen them play all over the place. Philip Chevron also went up as we hadn't seen Forest play for ages and we thought it would be a great day out... it was a beautiful day, and then that happened. The rest of the band and the manager felt it would be appropriate to dedicate the album to the people who died."

These tragedies are made even worse by the fact that people are there expecting to enjoy an event, a celebration:

"Right, and people aren't treated with respect even after they pay to go and see these things. So much rubbish has been written by politicians and administrators about why it happened but basically it's just that people who pay their money are not looked after, and in other countries they are. We have a very Victorian attitude to some things in this country."

Getting back to the album, and the idea of putting a boxer on the cover to contrast to the title *Peace And Love* was a nice angle:

"Yeah, the idea was to give the title an edge by using the boxer instead of a flower or a hippie. The title was a working title originally but we couldn't come up with anything better and it seemed appropriate for the last year what with all the death and destruction that's been happening at different levels in the world."

Producer Steve Lillywhite did *If I Should Fall From Grace* and he did a good job but on *Peace And Love* there seems to be a spark missing and maybe he's partly responsible. Why did you use him again?

"On the previous album we'd only gone half-way down the road with him and he wanted to do other things so we gave him the chance. *If I Should Fall From Grace* was recorded more live with the odd thing added to tidy it up, whereas this one was more built up piece by piece because we wanted to get the rhythm more solid, more groovy."

"Although Steve knows a lot of things, he's still learning — we don't want to work with somebody who thinks they know everything and Steve likes challenges. We have this new instrument, the hurdy-gurdy — a strange string thing that sounds medieval and Steve took that on as a challenge to record."

Since the Pogues' first album, *Red Roses For Me*, the band has undergone some line-up changes with Phil Chevron first appearing on *Rum Sodomy And The Lash* and Darryl Hunt and old folkie Terry Woods first turning up on *If I Should Fall From Grace*. Of the three, Woods should have the most impact with his strong and long traditionalist background?

"All three of us have had an impact in fact but it took Terry a while to loosen up as he hadn't written in a while but now he's coming out of himself and he's got so many traditional tunes in his head that it's always good to have somebody in the band who's so well versed in Irish music. When it comes to the bottom line, the traditional feel is what the band's about."

"He's like the godfather in the group. He's been going a long time... he actually remembers the Normans arriving in Ireland." Laughs. I could've sworn he was older.

Peace And Love for all its weaknesses and strengths, is behind them. The future holds more tours, more music and more drinking.

"We don't drink any more than anybody else. We don't play drunk, we just have a drink after the gig. You won't see any different scenes in our dressing room after a gig than you'll see in a bar on a Saturday night."

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