



On the Upbeat

By Maryann
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When I was teaching literature, I often started poetry units with song lyrics to hook the students' interest. Yeats was a poet I often introduced them to as he was easy to read and his words painted pictures in one's mind. I would love to have had Raymond Driver's just released masterpiece collection album I AM OF IRELAND/ Yeats in Song.

Driver has had a lifelong love of Yeats' poetry inspired by a gift book from his father. Raymond was only 8 years old,

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Fifty years later, still fascinated by the poems and word descriptions, he was walking in a woods reciting the love poem, He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven, and the music came for it. While he did not consider himself a musician, he eventually put over one hundred of Yeats' works to music. They were initially performed in New York by soprano Laura Whittenberger and pianist Peyson Moss. This album, though, was the brainchild of music producer Paul

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but the words were treasures to him with his favorite then being Down by the Salley Gardens.

Marsteller, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for encouraging Raymond to gather noted Irish folk singers and musicians to perform his compositions.

Despite the difficulties Covid created necessitating more than thirty musicians



located in three continents to work together online to record this, the result is a stunningly beautiful album that will be a favorite of all who get to listen. Two prereleases were more than enough of a carrot for me to be chomping at the bit to hear the rest. Dervish's Cathy Jordan, accompanied by the inimitable Seamie O'Dowd on fiddles, guitars, percussion, piano, and backing vocals—no talent here...., perform the namesake, I Am of Ireland. The intro music is strong and bold. Cathy's singing gives off a pride and presence that makes you want to stand and wave the tricolor. The accompanying band, which is Seamie, still truly blows my mind as I listen to it.

The second prerelease, completely different in tone, is He Tells of the Perfect Beauty sung favorite balladeer David Curley and accompanied by Lunasa band members Cillian Vallely ace of uilleann pipes, bass man extraordinaire Trevor Hutchinson, and Colin Farrell's soulful fiddle. It is difficult not to keep hitting replay; it is that enthralling.

Twenty-four poems put to music are included, each with a different and unique sound, and each performed so alluringly that you can't turn away from them. Dave Curley, Cathy Jordan, John Doyle, Christine Collister, Eleanor Shanley, Fergal McAloon, Jackie Oates, Seamie O'Dowd, Mick McAuley, Ashley Davis, and Brid O'Riordan are the lead vocalists, most singing at least two poems. Instrumentalists are Seamie O'Dowd, Colin Farrell, Cillian Vallely, Trevor Hutchinson, Kevin Burke, Laura Zaerr, Mick McAuley, Cal Scott, Gabriel Rhodes, Joel Zifkin, David Gossage, Rick Richards, Cormac De Barra, Dana Lyn, Mick O'Brien, Niall Hanna, John Spiers, Jack Rutter, Natalie Haas, Danny Levin, Leonard Barry, Stephen O'Dowd, Derek O'Sullivan, and Mick O'Brien. Add in each vocalist playing

their instrument of choice, and you have one incredible collection of poetry, song, and music, a true collection of the arts.

Some of the lyrics here you will recognize like John Doyle singing, "I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams" from He Wishes For the Cloths of Heaven. Others may be unfamiliar, but will long stay with you put to Driver's music.

The album cover itself will pull you in. Raymond is a graphic artist by trade and has used his talent to show the beauty of Ireland and the character of Yeats himself. It would be a poster many would enjoy having on their wall. Also available is a 16 page booklet of the lyrics, many with Driver's notes, truly a treasure!

This is an exceptional album. Even if you do not consider yourself a poetry lover, you may be pleasantly surprised to find out that you are. Information to listen and/or order can be found on the I AM OF IRELAND Website.

We actually have fests coming up where we can enjoy live music once again. Thank heavens for all the musicians who have been so generous to share music online for a year and a half, but Lord, I'm weary of watching it on my phone or pad!! I want to see it, hear it, and feel it live!! I'm so praying for our borders and embassies to open for our overseas bands.

La Crosse Irish Fest is being held August 13-15th. As of this writing, no entertainment list had been released, but it is a lovely small fest in a pretty setting. Milwaukee follows on the 20th-22nd. The CelticMKE Committee has worked feverishly to bring a great lineup which includes Cherish the Ladies, The Byrne Brothers, Eileen Ivers, Gaelic Storm, Jig Jam(fingers crossed), Runa, The Winifred Horan Trio, Screaming Orphans, Scythian, The Drowsy Lads, Seamus Kennedy, Seamus Egan, Mairtin De Cogain, Seven Nations, Tallymore, John Whelan & Brian Conway, Mick Maloney, Jimmy Keane & Pat Broaders, Moxie Strings, Rory Makem, and too many more to mention. There will also be an online concert series for those not yet ready for larger groups of people. Hit their full of information website for all you need to know.

The following week is another packed with talent weekend at the Peoria Irish-fest/Erin Feis. You'll get to enjoy Jig Jam, Scythian, Eileen Ivers, Lunasa members with Dave Curley, The Gothard Sisters, The Byrne Brothers, Bohola, AdamAgee & Jon Sousa, and many local bands, dancers, and exhibits.

Hope to catch you at one or both!