



Eamon Friel **"Here Is The River"** Thran Records

The river in the album title is the Foyle, which flows through the City of Londonderry, Northern Ireland, the city Friel that has resided in for most of his life. Born in London, England during 1949, Eamon's parents returned to Londonderry, his father's birthplace, five years later. Having graduated from Queen's University in Belfast as a History major, Friel went on to teach for a decade and a half, and spent some of that time working in an Inner London secondary school. These days Eamon is a presenter on BBC Radio Foyle, and **"Here Is The River"** is his fifth recording.

The narrator in the 'past, present and future' opening cut, "Here Is The River," informs us that he and his wife, 'simple, ordinary folk,' are *"Older than the ones we walk among, We're not old but darlin' we're not young, Most of them are on a longer lease."* In truth it's a love song that reflects on the passage of time – *"How can the river be where it was, When it's forever running away"* - and also on the human foible that we feel at ease when our surroundings remain constant and familiar. In parallel, as the lyric unfolds, Friel recalls 'the troubles,' now thankfully past, and the dark days that his beloved Derry witnessed – for instance, Sunday 30th January 1972 aka Bloody Sunday. Recalling one particularly violent episode, as Eamon viewed the city's smoke filled skyline, the spires of the city's cathedrals, St. Eugene's and St. Columb's, seemed to fuse into one - a metaphor for the reconciliation that came years later. Pursuing some of the foregoing themes, the front of the CD liner booklet features, in negative, the twin-spires of the Londonderry skyline, as well as a seasonal flight of birds. Those birds undoubtedly evoke the passage of time, as do a number of songs feature here.

The beat of a bodhran launches "I'll Go Along With You," a light-hearted 'modern' love song in which the girl asks the boy if he will marry her. In the opening verse of "King And Queen" Friel mentions *"Sliabh Sneacht"* [translated into English it means Snow Mountain], which is located on the Inishowen peninsula to the west of Londonderry [in Donegal, Eire]. The "King And Queen" in the title are nearby peaks, and imbuing them with a human voice, Friel allows them to describe their geographical surroundings, including the 'sourly humorous' contention, relative to the much higher Sliabh Sneacht that *"we are mountains and he is a hill."* On a less comic note the pair also recall events they've witnessed, from centuries long gone – the arrival of the Vikings, the foundering of Spain's Armada, Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War, Theobald Wolfe Tone and more. Light-hearted, certainly from a lyrical viewpoint, "Never Say Die" trades on the appearance of a 'bishop' and an 'actress' who have been, for decades, the principal players in a string of [usually bawdy] jokes passed by word of mouth on these islands.

The words to the self-explanatory "Love Of My Heart" reference the passage of time, while "From My Window" features the melody that once supported "Tamall Dom" a track on Eamon's album **"Word Of Spring"** [2000]. The original Irish lyric and this new one were co-written with Dave Duggan. Set to an old time sounding waltz, in "Under The Green Of The Trees" Friel [in person] returns to a secluded house that he last visited during his childhood. Now dilapidated, the garden overgrown, Friel recalls the lovers once parted by an ocean, and how they shared many happy years together after the man returned bearing *"American gold."* Wherever you live cast your eyes about your surroundings and you'll find discarded items, some almost new, other's broken or damaged. In "All The Lost Things" Eamon conjures up the life story of a few 'discarded items.' According to Eamon "The Western Wind" is the prevailing air current in his part of Northern Ireland and his song praises this natural world constant. **"Here Is The River"** winds gently to a close with the wistful, jazz tinged "The Shangri La Café."

Friel's words are consistently down to earth and straightforward albeit that they embrace poetic devices, while his thoroughly addictive melodies consistently possess a distinctly Irish flavour. In terms of approach and end result, Friel is to the Emerald Isle, as the musician Cormac McCarthy is to New England. In that regard, both allow the listener to share communion with the [local] landscape and its inhabitants.....

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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