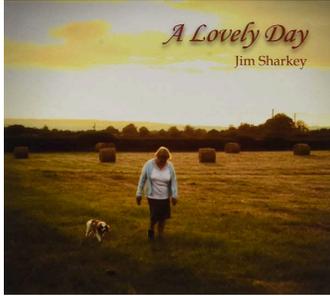


Music Reviews

By Sean Smith, Special to BostonIrish
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Jim Sharkey, “A Lovely Day” - This probably couldn't have been a more opportune time for the fourth album from this Roscommon native and current North Carolina



resident, who embarked on a later-in-life career as a singer-songwriter, melding Irish roots and American landscapes. If you're into unbridled anger and existential dread – not that those emotions aren't understandable these days, of course – you'll have to look elsewhere: Sharkey's songs celebrate the unhurried life and the merits of contemplation and remembrance, with tone and tempo to match.

On “A Lovely Day,” Sharkey once again animates Irish and American history through the lives and experiences of individuals, fictional and real-life. “My Home in Roscommon” is the most personal reminiscence, evoking local sites and people from his youth while also acknowledging them (and himself) as links in a very long chain: “My home in Roscommon where the Beaker Folk of old/settled round Aughurine 4,000 years ago.” Along similar lines is “The State It Has Me In” – based on an earlier incarnation of “My Home in Roscommon” – which strongly suggests that personal history might best be left alone where modern technology and social media is concerned (something with which more than a few Facebook users might agree).

“Mother Jones” is a perfectly good account of the Cork-born American labor leader – hard to improve on Andy Irvine's “Spirit of Mother Jones,” though – while “The Old Piano” revolves around an imagined biography of another female Irish immigrant who becomes part of the Dust Bowl migration, her life – and the Irish-American legacy itself – epitomized through the music she played: “Of Galway Bay; and The Homes of Donegal/Skibbereen; and The Derry Air/Shenandoah; This Land is Your Land/Songs that helped our country grow.” Going further back in time, Massachusetts is the setting for “The Highwayman,” a light-hearted Revolutionary-era ballad definitely not to be confused with the Alfred Noyes poem of the same name.

Other songs on “A Lovely Day” were inspired by events close to Sharkey's heart – including the weddings of his daughters, just a few months apart – but he depicts them as containing lessons and revelations that are universal: trying to fix something that seems beyond repair (“Just Try It”); finding one's muse through repose instead of stress and anxiety (“Father of the Bride”); how childish imagination can build adult confidence (“The Champion”); the richness that people often euphemistically dubbed “characters” bring to our lives (“The Christmas Comet”). And lest you think Sharkey is irretrievably nostalgic and set in the distant

past, he shows his appreciation for modern-day women's sports, and the 2019 Women's Cup in particular, in "The Beautiful Game."

The quality of musicianship on the album is quite impressive, what with the supporting cast around Sharkey (who plays guitar and harmonica), among them Colin Farrell of Lúnasa, who served as co-producer and appears at several junctures, including on his "Manchester Reel" at the end of "The State It Has Me In"; Farrell's band mate Cillian Vallely, playing uilleann pipes on two tracks, including "My Home in Roscommon"; Nuala Kennedy, lending harmony vocals on "The Old Piano" and two other songs; and current Bostonian Alan Murray, with solid guitar and bouzouki accompaniment.

Sharkey's songwriting is straightforward and plain-spoken, with an obvious affection for home and hearth, but doesn't come across as mawkish or cloying. Hard-edged polemics and rhetoric just aren't his style, and this is no small consideration in a time of very loud voices. [jimsharkeymusic.com]