

Interview

This Interview was conducted through eMail by Douglas Shoop - Web Master bestirishmusic.com

Q: Growing up in Dublin exposed you to a plethora of great traditional music at an early age. Did you have a musical idol or favorite performer who most influenced you in your music?

NP: Growing up in Dublin didn't exactly expose me to much music - apart from my parents who are (were) always lovers of music of all kinds most especially traditional Irish music. My mother is from Kilmihil, Co.Clare - a fact that I'm very proud of as Clare is the home of traditional Irish music. My father was a really beautiful singer. He would have sung to myself and my sister Anne all the time and in fact in light of his recent passing we were talking of how much he really did influence us - with his perfect notes, brilliant harmonies and great timing.

Traditional Irish music, when I was growing up, was not 'in'. But we lived near a hotel where there was a regular folk club (around the late 60's). They used to go to that club and rather than get a babysitter in to look after us - they took us there to listen to some of the 'greats' including Emmet Spiceland, The Johnstons (with Paul Brady), Danny Doyle, Anne Mulqueen (from whom I learnt 'the Boys of Barr na Sraide' in 1967!), Dolly MacMahon - these are the people I would have paid most attention to. Also there at the time were Matt Molloy and Liam O'Flynn who used to come back to the house for supper. I have memories of lying in bed with the most brilliant session in the room below. I think this was unusual in the suburbs of Dublin (even now!)

Q: Your origins obviously played a part in your musical interest. Did you ever have any dreams of a life involved with anything other than music?

NP: I never had any dreams of a life WITH music. Strangely enough I was a 'late starter'. I didn't sing in public until I was about 21 and that was in the local church choir. I eventually 'found' folk music at the age of 26. I worked in an Insurance Company for 14 years - which enabled me to travel the length and breadth of the country following music, singing, set-dancing. It wasn't until I met my husband that I decided to give up the day job, move to Belfast and start my musical career. By that time I had already been singing on stage for 4 years.

Q: How would you describe your experience with Killera and Gerry O'Connor and the following transition with the Waterboys.? What did you take away from that experience?

NP: I was very new to the stage during those Killera years. I think Gerry O'Connor is a great performer both then and now and I think he gently taught me some stage craft. I used to get very nervous - still do sometimes. I only did one concert with the Waterboys - in the Olympia in Dublin. There was about 1,700 people there. I was very very nervous so I don't think I even enjoyed the song. But I saw a video afterwards and I couldn't believe it was the same person - I seemed so confident. I learnt that I could rise to an occasion - which is very valuable. Adrenaline makes me ill but I seem to perform better.

Q: In researching many of your songs have you discovered any new, previously unknown meaning or facts which may have changed how you present the interpretation while performing?

NP: Not really, but as my life moves forward, some songs mean more to me as I experience more, becoming a mother, marriage breakup - loss of my father etc. A lot of the time I don't sing the song on stage until it is thoroughly researched - although new information comes to me all the time.

Q: Having recently completed a tour with a new combination of musicians have you found yourself expanding boundaries unforeseen in any way? What have you learned from this new experience?

NP: I have been working with different musicians for the last 2 years - and in fact with the Loose Connections which was always changing - but I'm in the lucky position of being the singer - so they have to follow me! The new guitarist Graham Dunne, with whom I've made this new recording is constantly pushing me - and this is a great challenge - his standards are very very high, and I have to work hard to keep up with him.

Q: I've read quotes from you saying that singing with such deep meaning and emotion takes everything you can give. What re-motivates you, refreshes you night after night for such moving performances?

NP: A good night's sleep! One of the things I love about most of the songs I sing is the age of the songs. They've been around for years - I am just another carrier of them. So that would motivate me.

Q: Stirring such emotion from your audiences must take you closer to them. Do you feel a personal interaction during those moments, or are you rather, taken away to place in your mind, reliving something very personal within yourself?

NP: I think I'm taken away to a place but not necessary reliving something personal within myself. As mentioned earlier, the songs themselves carry the singer and listener to a place long ago when life was different but the meaning of the songs can be related to emotions and events of today. So I sing, and audience listens and we both go there.

Q: When you sing for yourself, what do you enjoy most?, what moves you the way you move your fans?

NP: Its always the song itself. I need to get 'inside' it so I can deliver it emotionally. (It's probably why I have so few fast songs).

Q: Have you had any incidents extremely good or bad while performing? Anything out of the ordinary?

NP:Forgetting words - one of my nightmares. It doesn't often happen but when it does I can't replace the lost word. I swallowed a fly once while singing The Tinkerman's Daughter at an open-air gig - that was funny!

Q: Although you're based in Ireland has there been any one place you've favored above any other as a performance venue? And what are your observations on the differences in audiences geographically speaking? (Which leads me to the next question)

NP:Hard question. I've done so many great venues - from a 100 seater to thousands. Two stick in my mind. The Tractor in Seattle, Washington, USA. Every time I've done a concert there it was over in what seemed like 5 minutes and we didn't want to get off stage. The other venue was one I did on a German tour last year. There were 4 different acts and we did very large venues. This one was in Dusseldorf and was absolutely magnificent but I can't remember the name of it.

My observations of the different audiences are as follows: I don't know where I stand with Irish audiences. I love American audiences, they are so warm and appreciative. In England, they are very polite but quite enthusiastic, although very restrained in showing it. In Europe they are very enthusiastic and spend a lot of money on CDs if they enjoy what they have seen. I haven't been to Australia but I'm going to Japan soon for the first time.

Q: What are your observations on performing for audiences say in the United States, versus Ireland or Europe?

NP: I enjoy the United States most because they understand the language, often as not understand the music they are listening to. In Europe I'm never sure if they understand what I'm saying or singing but they are great audiences too. I hardly ever perform in Ireland.

Q: Are there any future projects you care to comment on? Anything we can all look forward to?

NP:Well, the new album In my Prime, came out only a year after Blackbirds and Thrushes - so I don't think I'll be doing anything for a while.

Q: Any words of advice for aspiring traditional musicians?

NP: Enjoy the music - if you do then anybody listening to you enjoying it will feel it too.

Q: Any parting comments?

NP: I feel blessed that my hobby is my work.

This Interview was conducted through eMail by Douglas Shoop -

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