

# SOCIAL JUSTICE RUNS THROUGH IT

The River Drivers are a quartet based in Bristol Borough, PA in the US, writes Grainne McCool.



The band recently spent a weekend in Donegal for the Cup of Tae Festival and I was fortunate to catch up with them on the night of their arrival. These four friends have been playing together for less than two years and come from very different backgrounds. With a hospital administrator, doctor, archaeologist and an occupational therapist, it is the most unlikely of unions. But a musical union it most certainly is, as I found out.

Marian Moran, who has family ties in the village of Ardara, Co. Donegal became inspired by the trad music scene when she heard it played in pubs around Ardara. She purchased a concertina and a low whistle in Donegal and began playing the tunes she had heard.

Mindy Murray, an old college room mate of Marian's, has a folk/rock background and later delved into bluegrass and Appalachian. Her music reflected a lot of what she saw in the proud mountain mining folk whom she met in her clinics and visited with her work. Meagan Ratini, is Mindy's daughter and a school friend of Kevin's, started out playing the flute and dulcimer. She now also plays the whistle and fiddle. She enjoys playing tunes from Ireland, Scotland, Appalachia and elsewhere.

Kevin McCloskey is the son of Irish tenor Tommy McCloskey and grew up playing guitar and banjo and singing with his father in pubs and venues around their home area. Kevin developed an avid interest in the

"Hundreds of years of songs by and about the disenfranchised all say the same things, in the end, that everyone wants freedom and a fair shake. It just so happens that the road to getting there, makes for some damn good music."

It's no coincidence that a lot of these songs have strong opinions, political and otherwise. All the power people lack in life can come back tenfold in their music. We have chosen to respect that legacy and let the songs speak for themselves."

Kevin put the bulk of the song list together and says of his choices, "I'm inspired by stories of men and women standing up against oppression and exploitation, or having the determination to struggle through hard times. I usually sing the songs that tell those stories."

So just what songs are on this new album? It consists of 11 tracks including: *Come out Ye Black and Tans; Tell God and the Devil; Dirty Old Town; Blair Mountain; Hot Asphalt; Erin go Bragh; Whiskey in the Jar; Plane Wreck at Los Gatos (Deportee); Manchester Rambler; Billy O'Shea and If Ever You were Mine*. The album is delivered with an honest, fresh intensity and from the onset, is set to raise the roof. It is an enthusiastic mix of rebel inspired folk/trad music and leaves you wanting to hear more.

All four of these musicians are multi-instrumentalists. Whilst listening and watching them play in The Céilí House, Ardara, it really was

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songs that spoke of man's spirit in the face of oppression and learned as much as he could about these songs and the history behind them.

For the past year the group have been playing a weekly session at their local pub in Pennsylvania. They have just recently released their first album. Self-titled, this compilation is a collection of covers alongside Mindy's *Blair Mountain*.

I asked Marian about the selection of covers and why they chose the said songs. "We are all drawn to songs with themes of social justice and the undying spirit of humanity as a whole. We sought out songs that express the spirit of the working man as an individual and the power of the working men and women united.

When we were putting the CD together, we wanted to include a note which would enable the listeners to understand why we chose the songs. Megan wrote this:

mesmerising how they could switch instruments mid song. They clearly have a personal connection to their music. As Marian says "these songs are our roots" and this passion for such comes across as you watch them.

What does the future hold for River Drivers? They are planning to write more original tracks, play local and regional festivals and are also planning a concert/festival tour later in the year through the Appalachians and possibly the Pacific Northwest.

Having just left Donegal after a brief visit, Marian says of the weekend, "The Cup of Tae festival was amazing. We met so many wonderful people and musicians and most of all I got to play sessions with my fellow River Drivers".

The Donegal visit may have been short, but this is one quartet which is set to return.