

#GALWAY

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GALWAY'S ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE



TAKE A CHANCE ON CHANCE MCCOY

By Charlie McBride

Americana fans should make space in their diary for the upcoming gig in the Róisín Dubh, on June 16, by the scintillating Chance McCoy, late of Old Crow Medicine Show and now making exciting music of his own.

A champion player of fiddle, banjo, and dulcimer in his native West Virginia, McCoy was with Old Crow Medicine Show from 2012 up to the end of last year when he announced that he was striking out on his own with a tour and forthcoming album, *Wander Wide*. The album sees McCoy move beyond the 'Old Crow' template to offer a captivating blend of traditional folk, modern electric arrangements and atmospheric production.

Ahead of his Galway visit, McCoy talked with me about his music and what the Róisín audience can expect from his gig. McCoy recently moved back to his farm in West Virginia, after six years in Nashville, and he began by

telling me how the region has shaped his sound. "It is a very beautiful place and the natural landscape does influence the sound of my music quite a bit. There is a beauty to it but it's also an isolated place so there is a lonesome sound in there as well. I think a big part of it is not being around other things going on; being isolated, and not being able to do things like go out to the theatre or to a venue to see a band. Where I live I have to drive 45 minutes to the grocery store and it's a two hour round-trip if I want to go see a movie. It is really rugged and mountainous, and to get anywhere is a pain, so you are kind of stuck with yourself and music is a great way to occupy yourself."

Music was very much part of the McCoy gene pool. "My grandfather played violin and my father Bing was a keyboardist who played piano and Hammond organ and synthesisers [McCoy's father played with the likes of Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt]. He was also an inventor and he was always

very into technology built instruments. He made an instrument that he sold to Gibson called the photon guitar which used infra-red light that would be used on the strings to detect pitches and turn that into MIDI information that can be turned into a synthesiser so you could play a synthesiser with a guitar. That was a groundbreaking invention for the time. The reason I started playing guitar is he had bought a bunch of Fender Stratocasters to chop up and 'Frankenstein' them when he was working on his prototype and one of the ones he didn't use was hanging on the wall in our living room for years and he finally let me take it down and play it."

McCoy sees Bing's influence in his own willingness to experiment musically. "I've definitely inherited his interest in trying new things and creating new sounds. I built my own studio and I've been trying to be creative with music and using new technologies in music and incorporating that into my own music

or in film scores, which I have been doing a lot of recently. I have a bunch of analogue synthesisers that I inherited from my father that I use as well as mixing folk instruments, and I'll combine different sounds, like on my recent singles, 'No One Loves You the Way that I Do' has a banjo and a synthesiser playing together, and 'Lonesome Pines' is a slow burn song that has an analogue synthesiser solo in it. I try to be inventive in those ways using all the different tools but in a way that makes the music creative and not just a mash-up."

McCoy once described himself as the George Harrison of Old Crow Medicine Show, in that his input to the group was often overshadowed. Just as Harrison had enough solo material for a triple album when the Beatles split, McCoy has been working on his own music whenever his band duties allowed. "For the last three years I was coming home from Old Crow Medicine Show and taking the money I was making on tour and

investing it into my studio and learning how to produce my own music. I did dozens and dozens and dozens of tracks while I was playing with Old Crow Medicine Show and they are just starting to be released now but there is a huge back catalogue. I was writing songs for Old Crow at the same time but nobody knows that unless they read the liner notes as to what songs I was writing, but a lot of my songs didn't fit inside that world. I could probably release another record right now of music I've written over that time period."

Wander Wide will be released in September and McCoy finessed the album over the course of a live residency in Nashville venue, the Basement. "The reason I did that is because when I was working in the studio I was trying lots of different things - I was making electronic music, pure folk music, different things and I ended up with this broad spectrum of music. I didn't know which direction to go down so I decided to do a residency at the Base-

ment and take my tracks and hone them down to those I could play as a three piece with guitar, bass and drums or fiddle, bass and drums. I wrote a set specifically where each song led into the next one and takes the listener on a journey through different facets of my music. That live set had about 10 songs and after those Nashville gigs I figured let's just go into the studio as a live band and cut that set list as the record, and that's what we did."

I wound up our interview by asking Chance whether his Galway show will be mostly his new material or will he also draw on tracks from Old Crow Medicine Show and his earlier, rootsy albums with Old Sledge and the Appalachian String Band. "It's a challenge trying to incorporate all the different elements," he admits. "I want to present songs from each period and we are doing something completely different as well where I have a DJ travelling with me and she is doing harmonies and helping me

with looping and she has a keyboard setup so we can present the music with all its different facets. It is very different to what a lot of people will be expecting as far as it being a folk show. It has taken people by surprise but it has been really well received. We've been trying to think how to define it and maybe 'electric folk' does it. I see a correlation between what was happening in the British Isles during the 1960s with people reinvigorating the folk tradition by using electric guitars and drums, and what I am doing now is like a modern take on that. I'm incorporating new elements because that's part of my creative process. There is always room for the traditional and that will always be a big part of what I do but why not be creative and do something new as well?"

Chance McCoy plays the Róisín Dubh on Sunday June 16. Doors are open at 8pm and tickets are €12.50 / €10 and include free admission to John Conneely Inc.