

DAVID HOWLEY'S *FOR VENUS*

David Howley recently released his debut album, *for Venus*, with eight original songs, writes Anne Marie Kennedy. The multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter shared his musical musings beginning with his early influences in the Howley family home.



Photo: Siobhan Moore

David: "I grew up in Galway surrounded by traditional Irish music and musicians. Joe Cooley's legacy embedding melody at a very early age. I feel lucky that my father's pure love of music instilled a 'music is for your soul' feeling in both my brother and myself. My dad played guitar and sang to us from the time we were babies, we grew up going to his gigs and tagging along when he played in sessions nearby. I was

It was sort of an experiment at first; what happens if I just let what ever comes up come out, no filtering or editing. A lot of these songs rose up naturally, inspired by conversations on topics like psychology, Jungian ideas, psychotherapy, the painting of Francis Bacon, mythology, love, conflict and much more. At the time I was very lucky to be living and working alongside other artists who continually kept me engaged, challenged in creativity, in many forms of art, all of them massively inspiring."

AMK: "The themes are mostly personal, dark at times. How do you approach writing a song, what is your process here?"

David: "The opening song *Monadnock* was written in the shadow of the mountain it was named after in New Hampshire. Roughly translating to 'the one who stands alone' in the Abenaki language. I felt a connection to this place, familiarity, ease, perhaps from having grown up at the foot of the well-worn Burren mountains, I made a connection. I initially wrote the song on claw hammer banjo, and in ways the production on this track embraces the full spectrum of the musical styles I've delved in over the years; mixing synths, drums and double bass with more Irish elements like bodhrán and the haunting fiddling of Uiltan O'Brien. Siobhán Moore, who produced the album, had an amazing approach of working with me until the songs sounded natural and well worn, a hard task given the pressure of the studio. The song *Beneath* really called for that approach, written as I watched an old tree being taken down outside my window, the invisible inner decay putting it at risk of falling, the intertwining of life and death in nature. The song features female duo Woven Kin whose

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always drawn to the interwoven guitar and vocal magic of artists like Paul Brady; his version of *Mary and the Soldier* to this day still amazes me. That simplicity became the bedrock of my own music and I feel like you can hear those threads of traditional melodies and vocal ornamentation in my songwriting no matter what I do. It's fun to see how those sounds that raised me, the background music of my childhood, continue to shine through even when I branch out as far as I have here with my first solo record."

AMK: "You've travelled far and wide with the music and now the composition phase?"

David: "I was lucky to be playing and performing from a young age; my first live gigs were before I was twelve years old in local pubs. After a rock band phase in school, at nineteen I started a band called We Banjo 3 alongside my brother Martin and the Scahill brothers, Fergal and Enda. For over ten years we've travelled together playing a mix of folk and bluegrass. Somewhere on that journey I became enamoured with songwriting as a way to process and reflect, to explore the inner and outer world around me. In 2020, surrounded by the snowy woods of New Hampshire, I started writing, something very different came out, words, emotions, songs that truly feel like my own expression in a way that is both slightly terrifying but also a real culmination of my musical experiences so far. I feel like I can live and breathe this music and fully mean it with every note, every phrase. Deep in the pandemic isolation of 2020 the melodies and lyrics surfaced like vignettes, snippets of dreams only barely remembered.

haunting harmonies really captured me the first time we sang it together."

AMK: "You're getting ready to road test it?"

David: "I'll be on tour this April around the US and this summer around Europe. All information and CD's available at davidhowleymusic.com and on my socials all under David Howley.



Photo: Siobhan Moore