

Music legend Don McLean chats to the Edinburgh Reporter



Music legend Don McLean, renowned as one of the most enduring singer-songwriters and forever associated with his classic hits American Pie and Vincent (Starry Starry Night) is looking forward to coming home to his family roots in Scotland next month when he performs at the Usher Hall on 27th May.

The tour marks the launch of a remastered CD and DVD of a classic concert which features Don in peak form before a sell-out crowd at the historic Free Trade Hall in Manchester on 22 October 1991.

The audio has never previously been released on any format. First time out on DVD (previously out on VHS 20 years ago)

Earlier today, Don whose father Donald McLean is part Scottish, kindly took time out of his busy schedule to chat to the Edinburgh Reporter about his love of Scotland and the capital in particular as well as telling the audience what they can expect on the night and reminiscing about his long and highly distinguished career.

Don said: "I'm looking forward to visiting Scotland very much. Edinburgh is beautiful, I love it there. It's just majestic. It's like no other place and I really mean that. You will probably see me on the streets of Edinburgh taking a nice walk so if you see a little guy with glasses and bushy hair, that's me.

"I used to play the old Apollo in Glasgow and the city was really a depressing place in the seventies but it has come back tremendously and I like Aberdeen as well although I'm not playing there on this trip.

“We are going to have a bigger band, with an extra guitar player so it’s going to be a little harder sound and it will be all the songs that the audience know including ‘Crying’, ‘Vincent’, ‘American Pie’, ‘Castles in the Air’ plus many of the songs from the first few albums I made but also new songs from an album I am making called ‘Botanical Gardens.’

“The concept of ‘Botanical Gardens’ is about a man getting away from the city and going behind iron gates to this garden with beautiful girls and imagining himself as a young person, meeting one, walking hand in hand in the rain then the end of the day comes and does he go back to the world or stay behind these gates with these beautiful girls in this fantasy world?

“There is also one song that is on the internet called The Waving Man and you could see if you felt like it. There is a video of the actual waving man who is right in front of his old age home where he lives. He actually goes out there to smoke and he started waving at folks.

“For at least two years I would see him waving me in and out. When I left town he would wave me goodbye and when I came home he would wave me hello, so he began to interest me and I wrote this song where I fantasised about his life which is actually pretty close to his actual life. My wife took some pictures on her phone and we put it on You Tube and now the man can hardly come out to wave as he is a sensation.

“I’ve not actually spoken to him. He’s 83 and has all the publicity he can take and I didn’t want to make this thing into anything bigger, but the town loves him and they all know about the song. There are waving men everywhere, that’s the other thing. I’ve had people come up to me after the shows and telling me that they have a waving man in their community. They’re all over the country and many are veterans.”

☒ The tour takes in 18 venues throughout the UK which would be exhausting to man half his age, but Don has no intention

of retiring as he explained: "I'll be 70 this year but I like to work a lot so I would miss it very much if I couldn't go out and do that. It's been a part of my life since I was a teenager and I don't know what I would do if I stopped. It would be like an old person losing their driving licence. It would ruin me I think."

Don hit the headlines last week when his handwritten lyrics for 'American Pie' were sold at Christie's in New York for an incredible \$1.2m and he has decided to hold another auction in two years time.

He continued: "That turned out very well. There are a lot of people that hate 'American Pie' and don't like me very much so if it hadn't sold I would have gotten a lot of 'we told you so' kind of stuff but they had to put their tails between their legs which gave me a lot of satisfaction. That's the Scottish side of me, I like to win.

"In about two years I am going to sell banjos, guitars, clothes I wore on albums as well as other things such as a high-end watch collection, some saddlery and silver buckles I've had through the years . It's going to be quite diverse. I have some nice antique Colt pistols. There is a movie and book called American Troubadour which tells everything about my life and career and a lot of the pictures in the book are pictures of the items I will probably sell. It will be quite extensive."

Don also looked back on his illustrious career: "In 2000, it was a wonderful honour to be invited to play at the Millenium concert and I was invited by President Clinton who particularly wanted me there. The concert was for people who had supposedly influenced the 20th century. I got to sing 'American Pie' as the lights on the Washington Monument and the words two thousand were lit in sparklers in front of 600,000 people around the reflecting pool there. I have had some wonderful moments in my career which have been because

mostly people wanted me there such as Garth Brooks at Central Park in front of a million people then the Glastonbury show was wonderful then we did 'Stagecoach' which was the biggest festival in America last year and that was hugely successful, but I do all kinds of shows, both big and small.

So would Don like to be starting again in the music industry today as a 16-year-old?

✘ "Oh good lord No. I wouldn't know how to do it. I have no idea how you would accomplish what I did today. It was so much easier then when you either hit a home run or you struck out. Now you can put a lot of money into somebody and get all kinds of stuff going on that means nothing. There is just so much activity out there and it means nothing. Even the number one record means nothing. It's gone in two days and no one ever cares about hearing it again.

"Every song I had in the charts is remembered all over the world and these songs are played somewhere every day. If you have a gift for songwriting for melody, for lyrics, for conceptualisation, there is a market for that. People want to hear that.

"I think rap music has been extremely damaging to the ability of audiences to hear real music. I believe that all they can hear is a catchy chorus. Furthermore the technology has made people's concentration less effective than what it was. They want instant information coming at them all the time and need to be stimulated constantly so the idea of a long song with lots of lyrics like 'American Pie' or songs that Bob Dylan would write.... We all listened to Bob Dylan as we were growing up, now you have to be an intellectual."

Since first hitting the charts in 1971, Don has amassed over 40 gold and platinum records world-wide and, in 2004, was inducted into the Songwriters' Hall of Fame. His songs have been recorded by artists from every musical genre, most

notably Madonna's #1 recording of American Pie in 2000 and George Michael's version of The Grave in 2003, sung in protest at the Iraq War.

The album is available at

<http://www.wienerworld.com/don-mclean-live-in-manchester.html>

or on Amazon at

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Live-Manchester-Special-2CD-Package/dp/B00N9A8RLC>