

Liner notes for 'Leyden' (Natural5Four Records N5F0522)

Around the beginning of 1990 I lived in Leyden Mansions on an post war council housing estate between the Hornsey Road and Crouch Hill in North London. It was squatted in the 1980's before being taken over by a short life housing association called ICH. There were about a hundred or so people living there and for the most part it had a strong community with a good core. It was a lifeline to many of us who were artists and musicians. The rent was affordable and the accommodation fairly stable and secure.

It was a colourful place to be and we saw many comings and a lot of goings. The building was arranged on three storeys shaped like a square horseshoe as a friend once recalled. I lived in one of the top floor flats with a view straight into the heart of London. The balconies where everybody would gather to chat and hang out. All night parties to see in the dawn...

Some of the run down ground floor flats were targeted by local drug dealers. A group of us got together to pick up used needles to protect the children and other vulnerable people who lived on the estate. An ice cream van would appear randomly in the street and we worked out that it was supplying the drugs. One highly charged night a group of us locked horns with the dealers. After that we managed to keep the place fairly clean.

We brought some bohemian character to the area. The local Shaftsbury pub was a sometimes place to spend a long day in staying out. There was the occasional lost weekend and some memorable jam sessions with everyone adding what they could to the proceedings. Some interesting collaborations came out of that place and it was a wild and wonderful creative ride while it lasted. There was a dark side as well with songs like 'Hungry Hill' describing the corrosive effect of low level poverty on the block.

I started out doing solo sets around London to promote the new songs. Small venues in the West End like Bunjies on Litchfield Street where Dan Driscoll would host a songwriters night called 'The Greenhouse Club' in the old cellar. P J Fahy ran the 'Ructions' club up in the Angel that resembled Merlin's Cave both in looks and atmosphere with PJ holding court in his own right. Joe Bidder and Frank Bangay booked me to perform at their Survivors Poetry nights in Kings Cross.

They were all part of an emerging acoustic music scene which briefly became known as the London Acoustic Network (LAN). For me it was an important period in honing my art as a solo performer. The kindness and encouragement of those people has never left me and has carried me forward ever since. We truly stand on the shoulders of giants.

When I first arrived in London I played under the name Jon Williams. There was a weekly music night called 'Club Dog' and I got to know the promoter who was appropriately called Bob Dog. One night he offered me a gig and gave me his phone number to follow up. When I rang I spelled my first name for him phonetically as J-O-N. Time Out was the main weekly listings magazine in London and it ended up going to print as J Owen Williams. That was my first 'Club Dog' gig and the first time I was listed with a stage name. Somewhere between then and now it ended up as JEoin.

As I began to settle myself the songs began to settle too. 'Sean One Shoe' was written around 1991 while I was living in Leyden and I found it interesting to see how it had evolved by the time I recorded it for the 'Exiles' album a decade down the road. It was a song that grew with me on stage and took its own time as I did myself in those days.

This 12 song retrospective collection 'Leyden' is a compilation of songs released through independent record labels during the 1990's.

'Leyden' was remastered by Lorcan Page and is released exclusively through Natural5Four Records as part of the JEoin back catalogue.

All songs are in the original running orders.

'Leyden' Track Listing

Tracks 1 to 6 - 'I'm No Angel' (Runaway Music)

A six song collection titled 'I'm No Angel' came out on cassette tape in 1994. It was recorded at a studio near Leyden Mansions called Pie in the Sky. I was joined by acoustic guitarist Theirry Labica for this recording. Theirry and I played as a duo and we also worked with a folk rock lineup called 'Ribbonmen'. We gigged on the North London circuit with bands such as 'Audio Murphy' in venues like the Weavers Arms in Stoke Newington and the Sir George Robey in Finsbury Park. Tom Mc Manamon, who I knew from our regular Traditional Irish sessions in the Mother Red Cap on the Holloway Road, came in and added his distinctive banjo playing on track 2 'Hungry Hill'. The session was engineered and mixed by a friend of mine from Ireland, John D O'Connor, who was producing his own music in London at the time.

Tracks 7 to 10 - 'Claws' (Runaway Music)

During the mid nineties I was experimenting with guitar effects and used a pedalboard with delay, echo, chorus and any other bits I could get my hands on. I would play in chill out rooms at West End clubs with names like 'The Seed' or 'The Brain' somewhere around Oxford Street. Curious buildings hidden in the back streets of the city. One song could last for half a set and it would all be part of the show as people drifted in and out of whatever space they were traversing at the time. Somewhere in the midst of all that magic and madness I met up with double bass player Peter Kubrick Townsend who was experimenting with poetry and bass soundscapes. We played together regularly and recorded the four song CD EP 'Claws' in 1997.

Tracks 11 and 12

In 1999 we recorded the CD single 'Eve Of Solution'. The session was produced by Chris Martin at Pathway Studios in Newington Green. It was favourably reviewed for the Guardian Guide at the time...

'Clearly steeped in Irish history and mythology, JEoin somehow conjures otherworldly menace from weaving acoustic guitars and double bass. Gratifyingly sincere, as is the delicate and genuinely romantic back-up track Call Me Down.' - Dominic Wills

The story behind this single has a bittersweet memory for me. In early 1999 I met with a music publishing company. A showcase gig was arranged for the 'Eve Of Solution' single release at Borders bookshop in Piccadilly and scheduled for 8pm with a 7.30pm meet and greet. I planned to be there for 6.30pm for set up and soundcheck. My nearest tube station at the time was Wood Green and I was travelling to Piccadilly Circus which would usually be a 20 to 25 minute journey. I boarded the tube before 6pm and everything was fine until we stopped between Kings Cross and Russell Square. The driver said there was a fault on the line and we would be moving as soon as possible. Instead, we sat there for nearly 2 hours before crawling to the next station. It was hot in the carriages, it was claustrophobic and it was frightening for everyone on board. It took another half hour or so to get out of the station because of the panic and confusion and it was nearly 9pm by the time I could get in touch with Borders bookshop to let them know what had happened. By that stage most people had left thinking it was a no show. It was a bitter disappointment for me and everyone who had worked so hard to set up the gig and I remember going back home the long way round just to clear my head that night. It took some time to let the dust settle.

I returned to playing solo sets at the beginning of 2000. There was a place I enjoyed playing called the Samuel Pepys right beside the Hackney Empire theatre. I was offered a weekly residency and after one particularly heady gig I ended up chatting late into the night with a fellow music enthusiast. We became friends and set up Natural5Four Records a few months later. I began recording my first full studio album titled 'Exiles' in 2001 which was eventually released at the 12 Bar Club in London's West End.

One story ended and another began.

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