

SNOW PATROL BIOGRAPHY

A few reasons why Snow Patrol are one of the biggest and boldest bands of the past decade: over 15 years, the part Irish, part Scottish five piece have transformed from cultish indie wannabes into a stadium-packing tour de force. They have shifted over ten million albums worldwide and been nominated for Grammys and Brits; scooped Meteors and Ivor Novello Album Awards.

At the heart of the band is Gary Lightbody, Snow Patrol's frontman and songwriter-in-chief. Over five studio albums, the 33 year-old has sketched heart-bruised laments and arm-around-your-best-mate festival anthems; radio hits and moments of painful introspection. All of these have been gathered together for Up To Now - a double album of 30 singles, cover versions and album tracks.

"It's a bit like photo album," says Lightbody. "It's a documentation of how the band got to where it is now. We've been working hard for 15 years - it wasn't something that happened overnight. We wanted to give people as honest an account of us as a band over the last five albums, warts and all. Yeah, we're being selectively honest and we might be covering over some of the cracks, but this collection really feels like an honest portrait of us as a band.

"At first we got it down to 40 songs but knew it had to be leaner than that and had a little trouble cutting some things we really liked out. But we got it down to 30 in the end. There's a wide range of stuff here - early material and singles, a few new songs and some covers, including our version of Crazy In Love."

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Most significantly, Up To Now is the sound of a band growing in public. Having formed in 1994 - early names included Shrug and Polar Bear - Snow Patrol scored their first record deal with Electric Honey and released the Starfighter Pilot EP. With renewed listening, the title track's barbed guitars and rough-around-the-edges lyrical worldview provides a charming glimpse of a band finding their feet.

"When I look at some of the old stuff, I think, 'Yeah some of it's childish and a little naïve but that's where I was at the time,'" says Lightbody. "I've got much better at communicating - I love writing more now than ever because I feel like I have more weapons in my armoury. I know more about myself now and I see things more clearly."

Starfighter Pilot was trailed with two albums on the underground label Jeepster (Songs for Polar Bears in 1998 and 2001's When It's All Over We Still Have To Clear Up) before the band signed to Polydor offshoot Fiction and released their breakthrough album Final Straw in 2003, recorded with studio producer, Jacknife Lee, which sold nearly two million copies. "It was a record that put us on a lot of people's radars," says Lightbody.

These were small steps when compared with what came next. Their follow up recording, Eyes Open (Fiction, 2006) presented Snow Patrol with global recognition. Featuring a settled band line-up that included bassist Paul Wilson (original bassist Mark McClelland parted ways with the band in 2004), guitarist Nathan Connolly, Jonny Quinn on drums and keyboardist Tom Simpson, its blend of love-crushed guitar riffs of weary laments seemed destined for pop ubiquity. In the song Chasing Cars they also created a world-wide smash.

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"Chasing Cars was the global turning point for us really," says Lightbody. "When I think of the success of that song it really blows me away - 2.2 million people downloaded it in America alone, and god knows how many people didn't actually pay for it. I guess it's the A student in the class." Chasing Cars lasted an incredible 91 weeks in the UK Top 75 (bettered only by Frank Sinatra's My Way) on its release in 2006 and became the band's first US top five single following its appearance in hospital drama, Grey's Anatomy. It's withstood the test of time, too. By anyone's standards, this is a hefty resume.

There's plenty of other stuff to enjoy on Up To Now, however. The pop rush of Chocolate, the epic yearning of Run and the haunting melancholia of Set The Fire To The Third Bar. "I wrote that for Martha Wainwright," says Lightbody. "She came to see us and I just blurted out: 'I wrote this about you!' Thankfully she didn't get embarrassed and told me she'd loved it. Imagine if she'd said, 'This sounds like a chimp's written it. It's shit.'"

Elsewhere, there's a reworking of early track and live favourite, An Olive Grove Facing The Sea. "When we do this live I play it on my own," says Lightbody. "Jackknife Lee heard me do it and said, 'Wow, I would love to record you doing that on your own.' So we did - just me and my electric guitar. The original version couldn't be further from the one on Up To Now, filled, as it is, to the brim with brass and choirs and mountain-sized guitars"

Up To Now is a treasure trove for fans. A bonus DVD offers three hours of live recordings and documentaries. Meanwhile, each disc of a two CD set features a recording from Snow Patrol side project, The Reindeer Section (Cartwheels and You Are My Joy), an indie supergroup featuring members of Scotland's guitar elite - Mogwai, Idlewild, The Vaselines, Belle and Sebastian and Teenage Fanclub - and coordinated by Lightbody.

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“The Reindeer Section were bigger than Snow Patrol for a while,” says Lightbody. “When we were in Japan we were actually chased down the streets. Hopefully releasing those songs again this will renew people’s interest in it.”

The three new tracks included here all point towards a creative hot streak in progress: the Balearic beats and sonic squelch of Just Say Yes and the haunting, intimate Dark Roman Wine which was recorded alone by Lightbody on an old pump organ.

“We were listening to bands like Passion Pit and MGMT for a while,” says Lightbody. “Just Say Yes comes from that. We’ve always been inspired by a love of electronic music and are obsessed with bands like LCD Soundsystem, Liquid Liquid, Vitalic and Friendly Fires – especially me and Tom as we DJ a lot – but it’s never been that obvious in our music until Just Say Yes. Certainly there were moments on Lightning Strike on our last album, A Hundred Million Suns [FICTION, 2008] but this is more obvious.

“Dark Roman Wine is one of my favourite songs out of all the ones I’ve written. It’s just a pump organ, a brass section and my voice so it’s a very strange arrangement.”

Lightbody is keen to point out that Up To Now presents the band with an exciting opportunity to reinvent the band, however subtle.

“We’ll have another album soon enough, but I really don’t know what direction we’ll go in. I love the idea of doing anything we want. I’m looking forward to making better records. But with this collection it’s good to climb the hill and look back. We want to look back at how far we’ve come and take in the view.”

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