

SARAH McQUAID

“The precision and sophistication of the writing and playing blows me away. I am so glad to be involved,” writes guitar legend Michael Chapman in his introduction to Sarah McQuaid’s fifth solo album *If We Dig Any Deeper It Could Get Dangerous* – which he offered to produce after meeting Sarah at a festival where they were both on the bill.

Recently honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Ards International Guitar Festival in Northern Ireland, Sarah’s also drawn critical praise for her voice (which has been variously likened to malt whiskey and melted chocolate) and her engaging rapport with audiences: “I’ve attended hundreds of concerts of all kinds, and her subtle mastery onstage launches her straight into my fave shows ever,” wrote *The Huffington Post*.



Reviewers of the Madrid-born, Chicago-raised, Cornwall-based singer/songwriter’s previous albums have repeatedly alluded to her “relative obscurity” (*The Big Takeover*) and “under-the-radar” (*The Vinyl District*) profile. With her new album – on which she expands her battery of instruments to include piano and electric guitar – she looks set to change that.

Born in Madrid (to a Spanish father and an American mother), raised in Chicago and now living in rural England, Sarah McQuaid was taught piano and guitar by her folksinging mother, and remembers being inspired by meeting her distant cousin, well-known singer/songwriter/storyteller Gamble Rogers, at her grandmother’s house in Indiana. From the age of twelve she was embarking on tours of the US and Canada with the Chicago Children’s Choir, and at eighteen she went to France for a year to study philosophy at the University of Strasbourg.

She moved to Ireland in 1994 and lived there for 13 years, working as a music journalist and magazine editor. In 2007, she re-released her 1997 debut solo album, *When Two Lovers Meet*, and launched her solo career with a performance on Irish national television as the musical guest on John Kelly’s popular Friday evening arts show *The View*. The same year saw her moving to England, and in 2008 she released her second album, *I Won’t Go Home ’Til Morning*. In contrast to the first album’s focus on Irish traditional songs and instrumentals, the follow-up was a celebration of old-time Appalachian folk, with Sarah’s arrangements punctuated by her own compositions and a cover of Bobbie Gentry’s classic “Ode to Billie Joe.” The two albums were re-released as a double-CD set in North America in 2010 and immediately went to No. 1 on both the album and artist Folk-DJ chart.

Crow Coyote Buffalo, an album of songs co-written by Sarah with fellow Penzance resident Zoë (author and performer of 1991 UK Top 10 hit single “Sunshine On A Rainy Day”), was released in 2009 under the band name Mama and garnered rave reviews: *Spiral Earth* described the pair as “Two pagan goddesses channelling the ghost of Jim Morrison.”

Like its predecessors, Sarah’s third album *The Plum Tree And The Rose* (Waterbug, 2012) was recorded in Trevor Hutchinson’s Dublin studio and produced by Gerry O’Beirne, but represented a departure from her previous work in that nine of its thirteen tracks were originals. Also featured were medieval and Elizabethan numbers and a cover of John Martyn’s “Solid Air”.

To record her fourth album *Walking Into White* (Waterbug, 2015), Sarah travelled from her adopted home in Cornwall, England, to the small town of Cornwall, New York, USA, in order to work with co-producers Jeremy Backofen and Sarah’s cousin Adam Pierce. Recorded and mixed in just under three weeks, *Walking Into White* was selected by *FolkWords* as Album of the Month and nominated for both Best Album from a Female Artist and Album of the Year.

In April 2017, Sarah was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Ards International Guitar Festival in Newtownards, Northern Ireland (previous recipients include legendary guitarists Davey Graham, John Renbourn, John Martyn, Martin Simpson, Pierre Bensusan and Martin Carthy) in recognition of her innovative use of the DADGAD tuning and her authorship of *The Irish DADGAD Guitar Book* (Ossian/Music Sales Inc, 1995). She regularly presents workshops on the DADGAD tuning (as well as on songwriting, tour booking and more) at festivals, music schools and venues around the globe, and is working on a follow-up book on DADGAD song accompaniment.

Sarah’s fifth album *If We Dig Any Deeper It Could Get Dangerous* (Shovel And A Spade, 2018) was produced by cult guitar great Michael Chapman, memorably described as a “granite-faced 76-year-old Yorkshireman hailed by the likes of Meg Baird, William Tyler and Ryley Walker as the godfather of new cosmic Americana” (*The Guardian*). A staunch champion of Sarah’s since the two met at the 2014 Village Pump Festival, Chapman has given her his Ibanez electric guitar on long-term loan; it features on several tracks on the album, which also sees Sarah playing piano, high-strung Stratocaster and her own 1965 Martin D-28 and custom-made Andy Manson acoustic guitars. The emphasis this time round is very much on Sarah’s superb writing (including instrumental originals as well as songs) and delivery, plus arrangements for guitar and voice of the medieval chant “Dies Irae” and Jeff Wayne’s classic “Forever Autumn”. She’ll be promoting it with 2018 tours in the UK, Ireland, USA and continental Europe, and hopes to extend her range into Canada, Australia and New Zealand the following year.

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"Finding treasure feels great, and such is the case with musician Sarah McQuaid. ... I've attended hundreds of concerts of all kinds, and her subtle mastery onstage launches her straight into my fave shows ever. One voice, one guitar, and the wondrous reminder of the magic of music. Sarah has the gift." — *Gregory Weinkauf, The Huffington Post, USA*

"Brilliant musicianship, a warm and welcoming stage presence and a voice as rich, matured and knowing as the finest thrice-distilled Irish malt whiskey." — *Geoff Wallis, fRoots, UK*

"Sarah was just fantastic – she had a sold out audience captivated from start to finish at Ards Arts Centre, Co. Down. A beautiful voice and technically accomplished player." — *Emily Crawford, Ards Arts Centre, Northern Ireland*

"The echoing magic of *Walking Into White*, the latest album from Sarah McQuaid, seizes you from the first and holds you captured long after the last notes fade.... Sending out a trembling resonance, this is a collection of songs that feel their way into your being." — *Tim Carroll, FolkWords, UK*

"A work that grows with each listen." — *Keith Ames, The Musician, UK*

"The songs are acutely observed and literate, almost like journal notes set to music. They're measured and tranquil but they're never dull because there is always a sense of restlessness and unease behind the poetry.... And it's all lovely." — *Ian Pickles, R2/Rock 'n' Reel, UK*

"Sarah McQuaid is what's known as a triple-threat; that is, she does three things extremely well, specifically sing, play guitar, and write songs *Walking into White* is another superb outing from Sarah McQuaid, an under-the-radar artist deserving of an audience reflective of her worldly scope." — *Joseph Neff, The Vinyl District, USA*

"Ein mutiges Album mit einem potenziellen Pophit." (*A courageous album that includes a potential pop hit.*) — *Mike Kamp, Folker, Germany*

"Original, acrobatique et audacieux ... Un album brillant ouvrant de nouvelles perspectives pour Sarah McQuaid." (*Original, acrobatic and audacious ... A brilliant album that opens new perspectives for Sarah McQuaid.*) — *Michel Preumont, ConcertMonkey, Belgium*

"A totally enthralling listen." — *Eileen McCabe, Irish Music Magazine, Ireland*

"*Walking Into White* is Sarah McQuaid's avontuurlijkste, meest ambitieuze en gewaagste album tot nu toe. En haar beste." (*Walking Into White is Sarah McQuaid's most adventurous, most ambitious and most daring album to date. And her best.*) — *Martin Overheul, Alt Country Forum, Netherlands*

"McQuaid's voice has an unforced richness which is the perfect foil for the echoing, spacious arrangements of her songs – and for her guitar, which here assumes a dazzling array of guises; one minute it's as plangent as a piano, the next, it's buzzing on a rock-and-roll riff. A unique, multi-textured sound emerges as each song pours out a new narrative." — *Piers Ford, Cry Me A Torch Song, UK*

"Sarah a su se moderniser sans se renier, osé être différente tout en restant elle-même, se renouveler avec talent." (*Sarah has succeeded in modernising herself without disowning herself, has dared to be different while at the same time remaining herself, renewing herself with talent.*) — *Sam Pierre, Le Cri du Coyote, France*

"Enkele draaibeurten verder beginnen de liedjes te beklijven en kan ik niet anders dan mijn hoed afnemen voor deze moedige zangeres die opnieuw een grote stap gezet heeft in haar ontwikkeling als muzikante." (*After a few spins I couldn't get the songs out of my head and I simply had to tip my hat to a singer who has obviously taken a major step forward in her musical career.*) — *Koos Gijsman, Heaven, Netherlands*

"A combination of seasoned craft and innovative ideas ... Highly recommended." — *Johanna B. Bodde, InsurgentCountry.net, Germany*

"An original fusion of jazz and folk ... that sounds like the journey of a vintage bourbon through a long winter night." — *Tiki Black, 1inmusic.com, UK*

"As frustrating as it must surely be that a greater public recognition has so far eluded her, Sarah McQuaid has clearly held true to her own musical vision and it's to be hoped that *Walking Into White* is the album which will bring her the wider commercial success she so richly deserves." — *Helen Gregory, Folk Radio UK*

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