

ALAN DOYLE

BACK TO THE HARBOUR

The boy from Petty Harbour, Newfoundland, is a born explorer who carries home with him wherever he goes. Anyone who's been observing keenly or casually over the last three decades will know Alan Doyle shifts his musical emphasis with natural ease while remaining true to the traditions of the place and people which form his artistic foundations. These truths hold on his latest release.

Back to the Harbour is a folk record. Its arrangements only lightly adorned, the lyrics direct. Absent are drums and bass, as Doyle was performing select shows as a trio when circumstances aligned serendipitously. "I had a few free days while touring around the Atlantic Bubble in November," explains Doyle breezily. "Nipped into Joel Plaskett's amazing New Scotland Yard studio with Cory (Tetford) and Kendel (Carson). We recorded six songs in three days right off the floor directly into an old tape machine." The recording has an immediate, intimate feeling; poignant in its clarity with themes identifiably characteristic of the Atlantic but simultaneously universal in sentiment. *Back to the Harbour* sounds as though it were performed in the listener's living room.

"Back Home on the Island" opens the EP and sets the scene with heartfelt conviction. This song reads as a newspaper article set in poetry. As Doyle says, "I first heard this song on TV sung by the most influential band I have ever known, Wonderful Grand Band. The voice singing was that of the legendary Ron Hynes though the words he spoke could have been directly from the mouth of any one of my father's generation in Petty Harbour." The weary lines of lament for a disappearing way of life remain timeless.

Taking a view of home from the other side of the ocean is "Into the Arms of Home", inspired in part by a visit to the WWI fields of Beaumont-Hamel, France, and written by Doyle with Cory Tetford as plaintive tribute to the many young Newfoundlanders lost at the battle of the Somme. "It is such hallowed ground that I expected it to be something more than what it is," recalls Doyle. "So many died. So much was sacrificed, I expected something otherworldly. But, of course, those soldiers who died were the extraordinary, not the place at all. Their bravery and the curse of war is what remains incredible. As for the place itself, it could have been anywhere. I took one look at it and said to my friends, 'This is just a meadow.'"

The heart of *Back to the Harbour* is undoubtedly found in the title track, led by the 'dogs of Petty Harbour' – Alan alongside his father, Tom. "I wanted a song my dad and I could sing, which could have been one of a million he knows top to bottom, but I thought it would be more special if we sang about us, and about how we both had to pack it up and leave our beloved little fishing harbour to find work." The opening line, "I'm a dog from Petty Harbour, like my father was before" is not self-deprecating but rather historical: folks from Petty Harbour used dog teams to get into St. John's to shop and sell. It was said that on a Saturday you could hear the barking on Water Street long before the sleighs came into sight. Word would get around downtown quick. "Here comes the Petty Harbour dogs."

"Leave Her Johnny" is a song Doyle confesses he can't remember learning; it's just always been part of the language of his life and that of his neighbours. It's a classic shanty with Irish roots from the 19th Century, customarily sung at last day of a voyage. It's a fitting companion to "Let It Be Me", the Everly Brothers' song which Doyle says has always had a traditional feel to his ear. "Like a lonely sailor or

soldier's lament for his one true love. I always wanted to record it around an out-of-tune upright piano at a Legion hall at closing time." These two songs, like so many unforgettable tunes and indeed all in this set, explore the pain of parting or its reverse, the expressed desire to remain close.

Back to the Harbour closes with a song Doyle says he wrote with someone he hasn't met and is likely unaware of the collaboration. While filming the feature film *Robin Hood* in 2009, Doyle was tasked with taking bits of script and fashioning fulsome songs for his character, Alan A'Dayle, to sing. "I took a short passage from a funeral scene and wrote this song as both a Farewell and a Coming Home. The final scene we shot did not require a song, so this was orphaned until I started singing it to open or close live shows." This is the first studio recording for "Dream of Home". As for the other, unintentional lyricist? "I still don't know who wrote the short passage in this song that remains at the heart of it and was the inspiration for it all."

Sometimes we are parting by circumstance or leaving by choice, or perhaps coming together by fate or reuniting by design. If one knows the canon of Great Big Sea and Alan Doyle's solo records, there can be no mistaking his distinctive voice and steady themes. With *Back to the Harbour*, Doyle seamlessly introduces new elements to his range while remaining close to his cherished traditions. Always pushing the boat out a little further, ever returning to shore.

Produced by Joel Plaskett at The New Scotland Yard
Engineered by Thomas Stajcer & Alex Burris
Mixed by Joel Plaskett, Thomas Stajcer & Cory Tetford
Mastered by J. LaPointe at Archive Mastering

MUSICIAN CREDITS

Joel Plaskett – Guitar, mandola, charango, vocals
Kendel Carson – Fiddle, vocals
Cory Tetford – Guitar, piano, accordion, vocals
Tom Doyle – Guest vocals
Alan Doyle – Bouzouki, accordion, vocals