

# Blackbird & Crow



————— *Electronic Press Kit* —————

## Blackbird & Crow

The musical cosmos of **BLACKBIRD & CROW** is almost infinite, it ranges from soul, blues, alternative rock, over Americana to Irish Folklore. Maighread and Stephen, two kindred spirits in music, come from Donegal County in the northwest of Ireland. They were discovered by Moya Brennan, singer and harpist of the Irish folk rock legend Clannad. After their debut „Shock Shatter Convince“ (2017, self-release), „Ailm“ is the second album of this extraordinary duo. While deeply rooted in the musical tradition of their home country, **BLACKBIRD & CROW** have always been open for many other trends in contemporary pop music. With Tommy McLaughlin (Altan, Villagers) they found the right producer, who helped them realise their musical ideas for the new album. Senior recording engineer Brian Masterson (Chieftaines, Van Morrison, Elvis Costello) then gave the album „Ailm“ its musical fine-tuning. The lyrics to their songs, almost all of which are written by Maighread, are highly important for the duo - and often they are not for easy listening. Far away from all everyday poetry, they feature topics

such as addiction, suicidal thoughts, abuse, social alienation, anxieties, stories about lost souls on the fringes of society and the gloomy aspects of Celtic mythology. A lot of personal experience finds its way into the lyrics, they offer a pitiless view into the past, also into that of their native Ireland. The songs are carried by Maighread's great voice, nuanced, not chummy, with distinct Irish flair, and by the virtuosity of Stephen on the stringed instruments. An impressive work by two exceptional musicians, showing a partly heavy, almost slightly disturbing, morbid beauty. This is often very touching, sometimes even comforting. While during their concerts, **BLACKBIRD & CROW** impress with their stage presence and their unrestrained power, the studio album „Ailm“ is dominated by the softer sounds and calls for close attention.

„Ailm“ is the Irish name of the twentieth letter of the Ogham alphabet; in the glossary „tree alphabet“

„Ailm“ represents the conifer. In the tree lore of Celtic mythology, the conifer stands for the healing of one's own soul. The „Ailm“-symbol allegorizes progress, a spiritual journey. But it is also the symbol for healing, protection, purification, guidance, fertility, energy, clarity, health, integrity and objectivity. „We think that this word and symbol represents us and our songs very well“, says Maighread. „A conifer can brave very rough conditions and can grow anywhere! We thought that this is pretty fitting, since we've been through a lot; many good things have happened to us, but also plenty of bad things. „Ailm“ stands for our journey so far.“

What touches you, remains. That's how it is when you have listened to „Ailm“ for the first time. That's what it is like when artists have an idea, and not just a great marketing plan for their next career step. „Ailm“ is a ruthlessly honest self-exploration, both harsh and beautiful, mainly from a first-person perspective, but often also in the third

person, as for example in „Margaret The Martyr“, which is in its stark intensity reminds of Shel Silverstein's „Ballad Of Lucy Jordan“. Only that the protagonist here does not end up in a nuthouse, but vegetates in a nursing home, abandoned and lonely. Maybe you don't have to understand the Irish soul to understand „Ailm“. But it helps.

A great album.

# Maighread & Stephen

## *When did you meet for the first time?*

**Stephen:** We met for the first time on Halloween night (Oct 31st) 2015 at a house party when Maighread approached me and asked me if I would follow her should she find a bedroom in the house. She found a bedroom and I followed her. After staying up all night we began dating and we wrote our first song together in January 2016.

## *When did you realize that you would work together musically in the future?*

**Stephen:** We knew we would write songs together very soon after meeting. It took Maighread some time to gather the confidence to share her songs and tunes with me, sometimes crying with fear as she handed me her notebook of lyrics. But in early 2016 we began writing songs together.

## *Who writes the songs? Do you both do it all together or does one write the lyrics and the other compose the melodies? What comes first, the lyrics or the music?*

**Maighread:** Our writing style varies from song to song but for this album I wrote the songs and we work together on the music. Sometime I will come up with music and bring it to Stephen and other times I will write songs and Stephen will put the music to the words himself. The songwriting process has always been a frustrating process for me in particular saying that I find it very difficult to bring the ideas, sounds and visions that live in my head out into the world. Stephen is a rare being who understands me when I describe what I am hearing and even rarer in his ability to bring these ideas to life.

## *When you go into the studio, do you already have all the sequences and arrangements in your mind or does much of this arise spontaneously, in the special recording situation?*

**Stephen:** Again this varies from song to song. Much of the second album was prepared before going to the studio. But a few such as "Mor Raghain", "The Ways That I Can Make You Suffer" and "Blackbird" very much came to life in the studio.

## *What made you choose Tommy McLaughlin as producer for your album „Ailm“?*

**Maighread:** We chose Tommy to produce our album because he is one of very few producers at the moment who does not overwork and overproduce the songs during the recording process. He has also worked with artists whose sound we love such as Lisa O'Neill, Villagers and Bell X1. We were confident that he would be able to capture the energy and sound we wanted and we were so right!

## *Who are your musical heroes and who has influenced you?*

**Stephen:** Our influences have changed in recent years but before writing this album we were listening to Lisa O'Neill, Sinead O'Connor, Jinx Lennon, Shane Macgowan, Glen Hansard and Lankum and a lot of gypsy folk music such as Ando Drom

## *The Irishman grows up with music, the traditional Irish folk can be heard all over the world. To what extent have you been influenced by the traditional musical roots of your home country?*

**Stephen:** I think you will hear the influence of our traditional music threading throughout this album. Irish traditional music is famous the world over because it is guided by spirit. Irish music comes up from the ground, meets your feet and travels through your body. If you are lucky enough to be able to transcend the energy of that music you are speaking a language that everyone with a vibrating soul can understand.

## *You come from and still live in County Donegal, Ireland. The County captivates by its rough beauty, but is also rather lonely. Does this loneliness give you strength and do you draw ideas for your songs from it?*

**Maighread:** Our connection to the land and culture here in Donegal and indeed Ireland has had a huge influence on this album, though maybe not as one might expect. This album is not representative of the stereotypical Donegal with its 'Cead Mile Failte's and Celtic romance. This album reveals the underbelly of oppression, isolation, addiction and abuse suffered by so many in this County and this Country. The isolation, poverty and indeed the beauty of Donegal is a heavy mix and we hope that we have managed to capture that complex weight and beauty in 'Ailm'

## *How's life in Donegal? Don't you sometimes want to live in a big city like Dublin or another European metropolis?*

**Maighread:** It is peculiar to us that anyone would want to live in a big city, where concrete is as close to the earth as bare feet can get. We look at the apartments of big cities and see humans confined to tiny living spaces like animals in a zoo. We are privileged to live in a part of the world where nature still reigns and no city could lure us away from this beautiful place.

## *It has been said that you were discovered and promoted, among others, by Moya Brennan of Irish folk-legend Clannad. How did this contact come about and how did she support you?*

**Stephen:** Moya Brennan runs a very successful monthly showcase of original Irish music called 'Clubeo' from her family run pub, Leos Tavern in Annagry, Co. Donegal. Moya has invited us to play at this monthly event many times over the years and has always been very supportive of us and our music. We are very lucky to have her and we would not be where we are today without her support.

## *With Moya Brennan, her younger sister Enya as well as Rory Gallagher three of the most famous Irish musicians are from Donegal. Do you want to continue this tradition?*

**Maighread:** Upps, this is a very big question and honestly you have just named some of the artists we most respect and so we can only hope to be somewhere close to as talented as the likes of Enya, Moya Brennan and Rory Gallagher. I think it is important to note that these artists created space for the likes of us and we recognise our responsibility to use that space with gratitude and respect. The hope for us is that we can continue the work of these amazing artists and hold the space they created. The dream would be to manage to push creative boundaries to the point where we leave a little more space for those coming after us too. That is the work of an artist, particularly a female artist in this business.

## *Ireland is the island of Celtic myths and legends. How important is the Gaelic language for you today as a form of expression for your songs?*

**Stephen:** We have found ourselves exploring the darker themes of Ireland's myths and legends in this album with songs like "Mor Raghain" - The Morrigan who was the Irish goddess of war, death and witches. We have taken the fascination with Celtic mysticism



and applied it to our music in ways that has not been done before - using the language and mythology to reveal and explore Ireland's painful past of child abuse, oppression of women, poverty and addiction.

*I understand. Your lyrics often deal with failed existences and outsiders on the margins of society. Do you have a special relationship with these people and do you feel somehow connected to them?*

**Maighread:** I am that person. I am deeply connected with those on the margins of society because this is the life I have had. This album is a sort of grieving process with denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance threading through this body of work. This is a personal album that deals with loss, alienation, rejection, abuse, addiction and self-loathing. It is not easy listening. It is an intense act of courage in that it gives a big voice to the most vulnerable parts of a troubled soul.

*In „Parting Rag“ one tortured soul seeks the advice of another (Shane McGowan). How did this song come about, particularly the idea to seek out Shane McGowan for advice? Have you ever spoken to Shane?*

**Maighread:** I wrote this song during the lowest point of my alcohol addiction. I was kept awake at night with hallucinations and suicidal thoughts. One night as I lay awake I wondered who I could reach out to that might understand my pain and I wrote a song where I spoke with Shane MacGowan and asked him if the music business was a place for someone who lived with such pain. I later had the opportunity to meet Shane and „Parting Rag“ is the story of that conversation.

*Do you have any idea what the world will be like for BLACKBIRD & CROW in two years?*

**Stephen:** This is an interesting question. We sincerely hope that we will have the opportunity to share our music with wider audiences and that people will connect with our music. But we are just

# Stephen & Maighread

grateful to be making honest music that comes from our soul.  
**Maighread:** We try not to look ahead. We are grateful for each opportunity to create and share our music.

*Finally one last question: Who is BLACKBIRD and who is CROW and why are these roles so distributed?*

**Stephen:** Maighread is the blackbird and I am the crow. Maighread took on the role of the blackbird because of the beautiful song it sings.

**Maighread:** And Stephen is the crow because of his stunning mane of dark hair!!



# Album



- |     |                                     |       |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1.  | Harlot On Holy Hill                 | 01:20 |
| 2.  | The Witch That Could Not Be Burned  | 04:33 |
| 3.  | Princess Of The Ditch               | 03:45 |
| 4.  | Blackbird                           | 04:48 |
| 5.  | Margaret The Martyr                 | 03:51 |
| 6.  | The Planter And The Runaway         | 05:49 |
| 7.  | A Pox On You                        | 03:58 |
| 8.  | Parting Rag                         | 04:52 |
| 9.  | Sweet Surrender                     | 05:23 |
| 10. | Orphan's Lament                     | 04:33 |
| 11. | Mo Chuisle                          | 05:00 |
| 12. | Mór Ríoghain                        | 06:15 |
| 13. | The Ways That I Can Make You Suffer | 05:09 |

## Bonus:

- |     |                              |       |
|-----|------------------------------|-------|
| 14. | Blackbird (radio edit)       | 03:24 |
| 15. | Sweet Surrender (radio edit) | 03:48 |

Total: 66:28





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## contact

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**Artist:**

Blackbird & Crow

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„Ailm“ is the Celtic symbol derived from the A of the Celtic Ogham alphabet. Ailm is assumed to mean “conifer/silver fir”. Conifers were associated with the healing of one’s soul in the tree lore.

In that sense, Ailm symbol is interpreted as the symbol of progress/moving forward. It can also be interpreted as a symbol of spiritual journey. The Ailm symbol also represents healing, protection, purification, guidance, fertility, pure energy, clarity, good health, integrity and objectivity.

We think that this word represents us and our songs very well!  
A fir tree can withstand very harsh conditions and can grow anywhere! We thought this to be quite fitting as we have been through quite a lot, some good and some bad.  
This title/symbol represents our journey so far.