

# NoCrows

## Why Us?

"Passion is a rare gift. Sometimes it takes years for people to find something they truly love and can be passionate about. But when passion is combined with music, magic will ensue. A certain note, tune or song can reflect one's deepest emotions and in doing so the musician gives people a voice, they offer their listeners a way to express themselves through their music and it's a relief for them to be able to do so."

A band needs time to grow, needs time to adjust to each other and for everyone to find their place within the group. With NoCrows it seems like no time at all has passed since that first session in 'Shoot The Crows', twelve years ago. Six musicians found each other and for many fans, nothing's been the same ever since. Love for music brought them together and it's that passion that shines through on their fifth record, 'Why Us?'.

NoCrows' music takes you to places you have only ever imagined, without even knowing that you dreamt about arriving there. The joy you find within their music is unique, the kind you never even knew existed until you heard one of their tunes. It's more than just some people gathering around in a recording studio, it's the experience of seeing them live and them managing to capture that sound on record. It's magic."

Liessa De Decker (\*)

(\*) Liessa is a Belgian journalist, regular contributor to Hot Press Magazine

NoCrows are:

**Felip Carbonell:** lead vocals, classical & flamenco guitars, castanets, ukulele

**Ray Coen:** lead vocals, acoustic & electric guitars, fiddle

**Anna Houston:** cello, mandolin, banjo, saw, backing vocals

**Eddie Lee:** double & electric bass, backing vocals

**Oleg Ponomarev:** fiddle, Hammond organ, backing vocals

**Steve Wickham:** lead vocals, fiddle, viola, mandolin

**Special Guest**

**Rían Trench:** Piano, Percussion

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1. Serpent's Head / The Broken Pledge (S. Wickham / Trad. Arr. NoCrows)
2. Metal Man (E. Lee / D. Lyttle)
3. Three Sisters (O. Ponomarev)
4. Señora (R. Coen)
5. Can We Borrow the Cat? (F. Carbonell)
6. Cançó de Febrer (G. Colom / F. Carbonell)
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10. Sleeping Giant / Leaping Giant (R. Coen / NoCrows)
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13. The Other Side (S. Wickham)

Thank you to: Lucie & Hazel, Brian & Whirling Discs, Rían, Urs and our beloved families and friends.

Produced by NoCrows

Recorded in The Meadow, Co. Wicklow by Rían Trench

Mixed by Rían Trench and NoCrows

Mastered by Urs Lanz @doolittlerecording.com, Co. Sligo

Cover Photo by Christoph Obrecht

Design by Daragh Stewart

*The spurious allegations against Ronnie Drew in the Metal Man story are completely fictitious..*

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## **1. Serpent's Head (Steve Wickham) / The Broken Pledge (Trad. Arr. NoCrows)**

*A few years ago Mike Scott gave Steve a title -'The Serpent's Head'- and asked him to compose a piece of music to go with it. This is the result. Steve also wrote a little poem about 'Manannán mac Lir', a character from these parts, to accompany the tune. Thanks Mike. We used a tanpura drone in the recording. The second tune is 'The Broken Pledge', a traditional Irish reel we have been playing for the last few years at our regular sessions and that seems to fit well with 'Serpent's Head'.*

Anna: mandolin, saw, banjo

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: acoustic guitar

Steve: lead vocals, fiddle

### ***Serpent's Head***

*Lyrics by Steve Wickham:*

Manannán  
Trickster in a Drab Coat  
Wave Sweeper  
Wielder of the Answerer  
Son of the Ocean,  
Child of the Sea  
Man of the Mountain  
King of the Island  
Wed to a Pearl of Beauty  
Whose Tears of Grief  
Gave rise to the Lakes of Ireland



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### 2. Metal Man (Eddie Lee / David Lyttle)

*This song is about one of Sligo's best known landmarks. It was written on a trip to Coney Island by Eddie and Armagh composer and drummer David Lyttle. Their room was overlooking the Metal Man, a statue right in the middle of the sea between Rosses Point and the island directing the ships coming into Sligo Harbour. He was a major feature of Eddie's childhood summers spent in Rosses Point so they decided to find out more about him. They did so and read some mysterious tales on the Rosses Point website by Kieran Devaney and others, including a scurrilous rumour about Ronnie Drew owning one of the Metal Men that were originally cast in 1821 under the command of Commander Blight (yes, him of 'Mutiny on the Bounty' fame). Thanks to all concerned and to Rosses Point for the inspiration. As mentioned on our CD back cover, we thank the Drew family for their full blessing with the lyrics and wish to state once again that any spurious allegations about Ronnie Drew contained in the song are completely fictitious*

Anna: cello, backing vocals  
Eddie: double bass, backing vocals,  
Felip: classical guitar  
Oleg: fiddle  
Ray: lead vocals, acoustic guitar  
Rían: cymbals  
Steve: fiddle



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## ***Metal Man***

*Lyrics by Eddie Lee & David Lyttle:*

Born in eighteen twenty-one  
One of four strong metal sons  
Standing twenty five feet high  
Watch the Sligo tides go by  
Metal Man, Metal Man

Two young brothers lost somehow  
To this day the've not been found  
Some say one's in Sydney Bay  
Lizard Island, Mandalay  
(Well) either way his life is done  
Metal life, lost so young  
Ronnie Drew stole the other one  
If only you could sail away  
Around the isle to Tramore Bay,  
You would see your brother guide  
Ships that visit with the tide  
Metal men, brothers, friends

A lantern blinks to light the way  
With your back to Knocknarea  
From Coney Island we watched you  
From Memory Harbour they did too  
Metal Man, Metal Man,  
Looking for your guiding hand

Looking east to Rosses Point,  
Where John Black built Elsinore,  
Is it true they haunt the place,  
Those smugglers who fell from grace?  
Do metal men have metal ghosts?  
I've been told there's metal souls.

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### 3. Three Sisters (Oleg Ponomarev)

*This tune was written years ago and dedicated to his three little sisters. They were kids, slim, beautiful, gracious, talented...three models so they were. And they loved each other... Now they are old, fat, grumpy, horrible and they don't like Oleg anymore.*

Anna: cello

Eddie: electric bass

Felip: classical guitar, flamenco guitar

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: acoustic guitar

Steve: fiddle



#### 4. Señora (Ray Coen)

*As a younger man, Ray fell in love with a lady from another country, but, alas, she returned home around Christmas and Ray was left to pine away with his romantic Frank Sinatra CD. The result was this song.*

Anna: cello  
Felip: classical guitar  
Oleg: fiddle  
Ray: lead vocals, acoustic guitar  
Steve: fiddle, viola

#### **Señora**

*Lyrics by Ray Coen:*

Señora, where are you now?  
I can feel you but I cannot see you.  
The angels tore us apart,  
Was it angels that sent you, Señora?  
Out of all the stars above I chose the sun.  
Y Señora, you're still the one.

Señora, when will I learn?  
Without you I'm going nowhere.  
The wheels slowly start to turn,  
And when they're done, ah Señora  
I will hold you in my arms as I have done  
Ah, Señora, you're still the one.

You must understand,  
Just the touch of your hand  
And my heart could melt.  
I know you felt that way too  
From your fingertips,  
To the smile on your lips.  
I send a kiss to you  
For now no more can I do

Señora, we'll meet again,  
I don't know when  
But I'll be thinking of you.  
Think of me, until then  
And know that I always will love you.

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### 5. Can We Borrow the Cat? (Felip Carbonell)

*In most cases tunes arrive to Felip's head without a title and then titles turn up as jokes. This was the case for this one: a cat was needed to get rid of mice...the cat was supposed to sing a scat vocal solo that we never managed to put in...finally the cat was shaved. It made perfect sense at the time.*

Anna: mandolin, cello

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar, flamenco guitar

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: acoustic guitar

Steve: fiddle





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### 6. Cançó de Febrer (Guillem Colom / Felip Carbonell)

*The words of this song were written by Mallorcan poet Guillem Colom in 1943. Felip put music to this and another 12 poems of his in one inspired day in 1980. The song was demoed in 2013 for Felip's solo album 'Els Colors del Temps' but didn't make the final cut. Three days before starting the recording of 'Why Us?' he wrote the instrumental middle riff so technically it took him 36 years to finish it and only 3 days for the rest of the band to learn it...*

Anna: mandolin, backing vocals

Eddie: double bass, backing vocals

Felip: lead vocals, classical guitar, ukulele, backing vocals

Oleg: fiddle, backing vocals

Ray: acoustic guitar, backing vocals

Rian: bass drum

Steve: fiddle, backing vocals

#### **Cançó de Febrer**

*Lyrics by Guillem Colom:*

Sant Macià  
L'oronella ve i el tord se'n va  
Sant Macià  
L'oronella ve i el tord se'n va

Ja es fonen les boirines  
Que arreu cobrien la serra  
S'aparellen les gavines  
I se'n tornen les titines  
Coa dreta i ventre en terra  
Coa dreta i ventre en terra

Verdeja la brulla al sol  
Brusca fina els camps esponja  
Canta i plora el verderol  
Amb la merla i l'oriol  
Sota un cel rosa i taronja  
Sota un cel rosa i taronja

La fosca dels cap-al-tards  
S'apagà amb la Candelera.  
La Mare de Déu de Març  
Argenta ara els dies llargs  
I ens porta la primavera  
I ens porta la primavera

## ***Cançó de Febrer***

*Roughly Translated into English:*

Saint Matthias (\*)...  
The swallow arrives and the thrush heads off  
Saint Matthias  
The swallow arrives and the thrush heads off

The mists covering the mountains  
Are already melting.  
The gulls are mating  
And the meadow pipits are leaving  
Tail up and belly down,  
Tail up and belly down

The buds are getting greener with the sun  
Fine drizzle sprinkle the fields  
The greenfinch sings and cries  
Along with the blackbird and the oriole  
Under a pink and orangey sky  
Under a pink and orangey sky

The darkness in the evenings  
Vanishes after Candelaria Day (\*).  
The Virgin of the Month of March (\*)  
Fills the long days with silver  
And brings us springtime  
And brings us springtime

(\*) In the Spanish calendar, saint days are celebrated all year around and are often associated to the beginning or end of seasons, agricultural activities or religious periods. Guillem Colom, the author of this poem, refers to several of them and their relation with the approaching springtime. Saint Matthias is celebrated on the 23rd of February. Candelaria Day (or Our Lady of Candelaria) on the 2nd of February traditionally starts the weather changing season that will culminate on the 25th March (Our Lady's of the Encarnation, popularly known as The Virgin of the Month of March) with the official arrival of Spring

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### 7. The Monk's Head / The Sugarloaf (Anna Houston)

*The first tune was born in Switzerland, where Anna was on a winter holiday at the foot of mountain 'Mönch', (Monk). Looking out of the window from where we were recording in Wicklow we had a lovely view of 'The Sugarloaf', hence the name to stay with the mountain theme.*

Anna: mandolin

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar, castanets

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: acoustic guitar, electric guitar

Steve: fiddle



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### 8. Written in Sand (Eddie Lee)

*Eddie wrote this piece dedicated to the plight of the people of Gaza*

Anna: Mandolin

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar

Ray: acoustic guitar





## 9. Shine on (Ray Coen)

*This is a simple song of complicated feelings. The musical riff was born out of an argument where there was an awful amount of talking with very little listening done. The lyrics were written with a bit more perspective 10 years later*

Anna: cello  
Eddie: double bass  
Felip: classical guitar  
Ray: lead vocals, acoustic guitar  
Rían: piano  
Steve: mandolin

### ***Shine on***

*Lyrics by Ray Coen:*

They don't know you like I do  
They don't know what you've been through  
They're not prepared to

To find the time, to seek a trace  
Of your headspace  
To see you  
Shine on

They say the light is special 'round here  
Somehow the colour's more clear  
That may be true.

Well that's not for me to say  
Though I saw something one day  
As the light it shone on you

Well they don't know you like I do  
And I don't ever want them to  
I love our memories

## 10. Sleeping Giant (Ray Coen) / Leaping Giant (NoCrows)

*The first tune popped into Ray's head in the middle of a guitar lesson he was giving. He cut the lesson short (apologies for that), walked the 5 minutes home and wrote it on a banjo belonging to Ultie, a friend who's family home is beside the Sleeping Giant, one of our Sligo beloved mountains. Ray could picture Ultie playing banjo at home waking the giant, so thought it would make a good title. We started playing Sleeping Giant at our regular session in Shoot the Crows but it always needed something to come afterwards. We discussed what kind of a tune we wanted...'it's got to have this, it should have that' but we never really looked at it properly. One night Eddie started a riff, Felip joined in with that rhythm. Anna and Ray looked at each other and something very like what we now hear came out...at least that's how Ray remembers it.*

Anna: mandolin, banjo

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: fiddle

Steve: fiddle



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### 11. Why Us? (Felip Carbonell)

*There is far too much violence in the world today. Far too many innocent people killed because of their colour, religious or political views and beliefs. And we are all potential targets of that hate. This is a shout for solidarity, respect and tolerance in a society that is losing its fundamental pillars.*

Anna: cello

Eddie: double bass

Felip: classical guitar

Oleg: fiddle

Ray: acoustic guitar

Steve: fiddle



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### 12. A Kriek, a Croque and a Kwak, quick (Anna Houston)

*This quirky little number is dedicated to Belgian food and drink. Thanks to our Belgian friends for making us feel always so welcome every time we tour their country! Crêque Monsieur and waffles mix very well with any Belgian beer: Kriek, Kwak, Duvel, Chimay, Leffe, Maredsou, Westmalle, and so many more...we hope to keep touring Belgium until we try them all.*

Anna: mandolin  
Eddie: electric bass  
Felip: classical guitar  
Oleg: fiddle  
Ray: guitar  
Steve: fiddle





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### 13. The Other Side (Steve Wickham)

*Here is a deep meaningful song from Steve's pen. Oleg could not resist playing the Hammond when he saw it in the studio...*

Anna: mandolin, backing vocals

Eddie: double bass, backing vocals

Felip: classical guitar

Oleg: Hammond organ

Ray: acoustic guitar, backing vocals

Steve: lead vocals, fiddle



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### **The Other Side**

*Lyrics by Steve Wickham:*

You go east I'll go west  
Take whichever road suits you best  
We're bound to meet on the other side

I remember the day when you were born  
The party went on 'til after dawn  
And she was like a swan

I left home when I was just a lad  
A penny whistle was all I had  
About that time he beat her up bad

I left, her heart was breaking inside  
She wanted me to stay by her side  
But I was gone on the morning tide

You go east I'll go west  
I stay cool and you stay blessed  
We're bound to meet on the other side

She cleaned up when you blew your lid  
Illinois, Dublin and Madrid  
You don't remember that now, do you kid?

Oh sister, what have you done?  
You forgot the place where you come from  
You're a fugitive now and a vagabond.

Do to others as they do to you  
The fruits of your labour just might see you through  
There's only room in this house for a single fool

You go east I'll go west  
I'll bang my drum, you beat your chest  
We're bound to meet on the other side

The bed they shared was freezing cold  
Full of burnt out bridges and vitriol  
Take your own advice get out and save your soul.

You can walk or you can crawl  
The sea will come a knocking down the wall  
If you build a house on sand its bound to fall

You go east I'll go west  
We'll meet on the other side  
We're bound to meet on the other side