

PAUL O'BRIEN

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BIOGRAPHY

"A working class poet (...) with a knack for straightforward language held aloft by a sweet gift of melody..." -Boulevard Magazine

Paul O'Brien is a singer, songwriter and instrumentalist with a gift for going straight to the emotional heart of the story, and taking his listeners with him. Born and raised Irish Catholic in an English inner city, he spent the first twenty-odd years of his professional life playing traditional Celtic music for pub gigs, folk festivals, folk clubs and private concerts throughout the UK, Europe, the US and the Middle East. At age 38, finding himself burned out, creatively stifled and desperately unhappy, he turned off and checked out. In 2004 he left the UK and his music career behind, moving with his family to Canada's Pacific Northwest for a fresh start as a classroom teacher in

He hadn't counted on Canada, though. Wasn't expecting to fall in love with his new home, or to forge a visceral emotional connection to the land, its people and history. The immigration experience created a tectonic shift in O'Brien, unleashing a creative energy he had long suppressed. Suddenly, the gifted songwriter thrashing around inside him wanted OUT. While teaching full time, O'Brien wrote and recorded two CDs of original songs, both produced by Juno Award nominee Joby Baker: *Sacred Lines* (2006) and *Plastic* (2008). Both met with overwhelmingly positive response; *Plastic* was included in prominent Top Ten Best Albums of 2008 lists published by Penguin Eggs Folk Magazine, BBC Radio (Folk Roots) and CBC Radio.

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"[Paul] is a listener. He picks up on real histories and issues, turning them into succinct musical stories that...hurl themselves at you and make you want to sit down and talk about the people, their lives and what we can learn from them." - **Mike Scott, Ashby Folk Festival, UK**

The gigs started coming in. O'Brien's full-time teaching job became a part-time teaching job, and then he left teaching entirely to focus on this second iteration of his music career. Along with regular appearances in and around his home base of Vancouver Island came a burgeoning international career. After touring England, Scotland and Ireland in early 2009, O'Brien was signed by Stockfish Records, a prestigious German label. He travelled to Germany to record an album produced by Gunter Pauler (well-known in Europe and elsewhere for his work with The Fureys and Davey Arthur, Dick Gaughan, Dolores Keane, Mike Silver and others) and acclaimed guitarist Uli Kringler. Walk Back Home was released in the fall of 2009 and O'Brien followed it up with a highly successful German tour. Next on the docket is a return to the UK in November 2009, for a month-long tour that includes a slate of song-writing workshops offered in schools. More European dates (Germany, Switzerland and Holland) are planned for the spring and fall of 2010.

"Reminiscent of Simon & Garfunkel, Tom Rush, Cat Stevens, Allan Taylor, Gordon Lightfoot, James Taylor..." - **Wolfgang Geise, Rock Times**

O'Brien is a songwriter with deep roots and broad horizons. In the long tradition of folk / roots artists everywhere, he honours his musical roots by teaching guitar, mandolin and bodhran, the traditional Irish drum. (In fact, he is a virtuoso bodhran player, and will sometimes treat audiences to a hypnotic interlude of drumming.) But since the beginning of his career, his influences have been diverse – everything from new English folk to reggae. As a teenager he had his own reggae band, heavily influenced by UB40 and The Beat. Even back then, he didn't colour inside the lines.

"Paul O'Brien (...) is a modern day poet, a guardian of our history. He knows how to tell us, easily and gracefully, stories that are serious, romantic, personal by turns; about love, and nature, and...well, life!" - **Marc Philip, Magazine Audio**

O'Brien has developed an eclectic folk style that is broadly appealing and not easily categorized. His experiences as an immigrant, musician and teacher, his natural instinct for humour and storytelling, and his empathy for the underdog have combined to produce an insightful and entertaining artist. Paul O'Brien's concerts are dynamic affairs, and his connection with the audience is palpable. No room is too large or too small for him. In the space of one song, he can take his audience from foot stomping energy to the absolute stillness of choked-back tears.

"The moment of listening had that feeling of being something special and rare. Paul (...) has a perfect voice for his subjects, strong, warm and able to create a sense of intimacy with his listener. He calls us to action with songs that ring like anthems and makes us cry with reminders of social injustice." - **Sheryl McKay, CBC Radio Two**

Paul O'Brien sings with anger and sorrow about the effects of ignorance and intolerance past and present, and with joy and gratitude about the natural beauty of his adopted home on Vancouver Island. He tells stories of family, of love lost and found, of the emigrant's sense of alienation, the loneliness of leaving home and starting over in a strange place....and of irrepressible optimism and the excitement of new adventure. His honest, accessible songs capture the constant dance between past, present and future...the search for a sense of place and belonging that marks all our lives.