

Snow Patrol

"There are swaggering bands, bands who are in your face. And then there are bands who get hold of you somewhere else. I think it's a heart thing, an intimacy thing. Like you know them and they know you. I think we are one of those bands."

So says Snow Patrol singer and chief songwriter Gary Lightbody. And all the proof you'll need is Snow Patrol's new album "Eyes Open", a collection of songs which more than makes good on the promise of its predecessor, 2004's two million selling *Final Straw*.

Recorded during a hectic 2005, "Eyes Open" is the work of a band who have scaled the heights supporting U2 through Europe, appearing at Live 8 in both Hyde Park and Scotland but somehow stuck to their core values: beautiful powerful songs underscored by some of the most poignant and telling lyrics in rock.

"It's been an amazing couple of years. But when it came to writing the new album we were quite monastic. It was a question of "We've had our fun. None of that counts now. Don't look back admiringly at your own footprints. It's all lost unless this next step is truly exceptional."

And so in February 2005, Snow Patrol convened in Dingle on the west coast of Ireland. Drummer Jonny Quinn knew the area well and convinced the band the remote cottage once used by Kate Bush would best channel the Snow Patrol spirit. "I read meaning into everything." Says Lightbody. "And yes, the studio was on a cliff edge with the sea crashing just beneath." And it was from these early writing sessions that 'Eyes Open' began its journey to completion, via recording sessions in Kent and Grouse Lodge, Ireland.

Snow Patrol have been up against it before. It's two years now since their unforgettable anthem of love and longing "Run" was released, reaching number five in the UK charts and propelling "Final Straw" to number three - going on to sell 1.2 million in the UK alone, and winning them an Ivor Novello for Best Album of 2005. After ten years together it was the culmination of years of faith and hard work. "I defy any band not to be a bit shell shocked." Says guitarist Nathan Connolly. "The world decides they like you and suddenly your heroes are in the audience. Michael Stipe was very nice to us at the Isle of Wight festival. But we have our own checks and balances. We know when we're at our best". "We're quite hard on ourselves" adds Lightbody. "Snow Patrol wouldn't be what it is if we didn't have that inner core of self-criticism and without wanting to sound like some kind of self-flagellating monk, a truthfulness and an honesty."

Lightbody and drummer Jonny Quinn are from Belfast and it's environs but the band began when Gary met former bass Mark McLelland (who parted company with the band in 2005) met at Dundee University in 1994. In 1997 they released an EP as Polar Bear on Electric Honey records in Glasgow. They were then picked up by Jeepster records, changed their name to Snow Patrol and released two albums - 1998's "Songs For Polar Bears" and 2001's "When It's All Over We Still Have To Clear Up". In 2003 they signed to Polydor/Fiction Records and began work on "Final Straw" with Garret "Jackknife" Lee, honing their distinctive and evocative sound.

"Once we'd found him we really couldn't consider anyone else. He's like a band member. He knows what we can do and he won't let us go to bed or crack open a beer until we've done it." Lee returned to produce "Eyes Open". The first thing he did was sit down with Lightbody and apply a rigorous critical eye to the demos accumulated over more than two years. The exponential leap in the Snow Patrol's ideas and sound was soon evident.

The album's driving opener "You're All I Have" thrums with bold power. Then there is the stunning guest vocal of Martha Wainwright on "Set The Fire To The Third Bar". Lightbody wrote the song towards the end of the album sessions and thought it would fit Wainwright's voice perfectly. By chance she was touring Ireland at the time. "I'm not a great believer in fate." Says Lightbody. "But when someone called to say "She's here, in this country and she wants to sing it, that was definitely "a moment".

Listen too for the choir of Celtic indie elite (which includes Eugene Kelly, Charlie Clarke, Jenny Reeve and Iain Archer), who appear on four tracks and the keyboard contributions of Posies /Big Star and REM live player Ken Stringfellow.

The hymn-like electronica of the album's closing track "Finish Line" is another departure but it's on the stunning "Chasing Cars" that the album's inner spirit resides. "That's the most pure and open love song I've ever written." Says Lightbody.

What you hear on "Eyes Open" is the sound of a band playing at the height of their powers. Hardly surprising since the band have spent the best part of the last two and a half years on the road. But also, they have added a new dimension in two new members. In February 2005 bassist Mark McClelland left the band. Multi-instrumentalist Paul Wilson, a long time friend and regular member of their live line-up, took his place. "In terms of songwriting he's like having a spare brain." laughs Lightbody. "You think 'Why can't we do that?', and then Paul can. He's given this album something extra." And completing the new five-piece line up is Tom Simpson. His keyboard and programming skills have been complimenting the band on the road for some time and now a permanent member, his addition in the studio adds yet another element to "Eyes Open".

"Eyes Open" is Snow Patrol's post card from the cliff edge, and it's message is one that has connected. On release at the start of May 2006, the album went straight to the top of the album charts in the UK and Ireland, giving the band their first number one record, while the first singles from it 'You're All I Have' (in the UK) and 'Hands Open' (in the USA) have given the band massive airplay hits on both sides of the Atlantic. Sold out tours of the UK, Europe and America have all been completed to great acclaim, and Eyes Open is the band's most successful record to date in the UK, America and all around the world.

The band's next release is 'Chasing Cars' on July 17th. Already a huge live favourite, it's set to soundtrack a million summers across the globe.