

# The Gazette

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Ireland's only weekly Students Union Magazine.

## Christy Dignam Interview

- by Fergal Kavanagh

Ballyvourney, deep in the heart of the Gaeltacht, an unlikely spot to find a recording studio, but there you go. Christy Dignam and Conor Goff are here in Sulán recording their first album together, to be released on February 1st. Christy is talking 'shop' with Joe O'Herlihy, Conor has gone shooting with a local farmer. Christy takes me into the studio to watch him 'lay down' a new track, 'Lying To Each Other' but it just 'doesn't happen', so we disappear to record the interview ("Well my favourite colour is red, my favourite girls have tits, and my favourite music.....").

Two doors down from the studio, in the house where Séan O Riordán was

born (yes, we're talking mega stardom here!) we sat down in front of Sports Stadium. I began by asking him how the new album was going.

Christy Dignam: "It's going brilliant, I think it's going to be a great album. I took my time over the songs because I wanted to be sure cos people are waiting to see what would happen after Aslan. They're looking at me and saying 'the ex-singer in a band, ex-junkie' and all this shit, so they have reserved opinions of it. So I have to disprove a lot of that shit. I wrote these songs about a year ago and just spent the last year playing the songs live and stuff to get the round corners off. When you write a song first, it's not aerodynamic. It's like a stone on the beach where it starts off square and after a hundred years it gets rounder - aerodynamic. Well the songs are the same, the corners start getting knocked off them at gigs and stuff.

You had a strong live following with Aslan. Do you remember playing Cork Rocks in '86, a year before 'Feel No Shame', your debut album? Yeah, that was the Carling....

You were supporting Cactus World News. That's right, yeah.

(Contd. p.8)

### This week:

Seamus Heaney  
Interview ...p. 4

Music.... p. 8 - 11

Societies News  
....p.17

**Karaoke Sing-along**  
**Every night during**  
**Christmas**

Thurs Dec 13: Bootleggers Nite-club

Fri Dec 14: Black Velvet Band



Sat Dec 15: SWIM

Sun Dec 16: The Meridian Theatre  
Charity Auction

Mon Dec 17: Firnigen's Wake

**Bootleggers**  
**Nite Club**  
**OPEN LATE**  
**7 nights**

Tues Dec 18: Galleon

Wed Dec 19: Firnigen's Wake

Concession with Student I.D.



I have some photos of that gig. (Shows photo's).

Ah, for Christ's sake! That was one of the best gigs I've ever done. Before that we'd never done a bar gig. Every gig we'd done were in places half the size of Sir Henry's, pubs and stuff all over Dublin. We had 'This Is' out as a single and the band were starting to get a bit of profile. We had no deal or anything, the single was released on an independent label. We were just a filler. In fact, somebody pulled out and we were shoved in at the last minute if I was absolutely honest. I remember we were going on about 2 o'clock and there was about 300 people outside, so that was probably the biggest crowd I'd ever played to, so I was quite happy with that.

We had this intro where the band walked on and I was backstage and I couldn't see out. The band walked out and I heard cheer and I thought these 300 people are making a lot of fucking noise. I walked out and when I saw the fucking crowd there, I couldn't believe it. So that put me into autopilot then. You're in a position where you're saying "You can't fuck up here", you know, and I just went out and it was the first time I got a reaction from a crowd I could see. When you're playing in a club or a pub, you can see into the whites of their eyes and it's a lot easier to communicate, but when you've got your stage and it's kind of ten feet above everybody then you've got ten feet of fucking barricade or something, then you've got the public and it's a weird buzz. It's weird trying to drag them into the gig, you know, and it happened. So because of that reason it's one of the most most memorable gigs I've ever done.

**"With Aslan we tried to push the standard of Irish music up a bit."**

What exactly, if you don't mind me asking, happened with Aslan, how come it turned sour?

Well, there's a lot of things. Looking back at it now there's, I don't know, bitterness and that left from the whole episode. It's just a part of my life that's done. I'm not ashamed of anything that happened, I'm not ashamed of anything we did. Musically, everything we did I thought was of a very high standard. What we tried to do with Aslan was, we felt that when you listen to the radio and stuff we used to know the minute this song came on, an Irish band had this Irish thing about them, and not because they had an identity but because it was poor quality and stuff, so we tried to just push the standard of Irish music up a little bit and I think at that time it was exciting and it is new. We did the American tour and it became apparent that we weren't getting on, also I was abusing heroin at the time. Because of that there were a lot of personality things going on in the band. Also, musically, I

felt the band were getting more into a pop end of music, which was something that I wasn't particularly mad about. So there was a lot of typical things where the members of the band were insisting on writing a lot of lyrics which I wasn't comfortable singing. It just disintegrated around us. It was a pity, I mean we were a great band and we could have gone on to be an absolutely great band on a world scale but unfortunately it wasn't to be.

**"All I ever want to be is just myself."**

Are you still having your voice trained?

Well I mean for me you see, I never really met anybody that absolutely understood what singing is about. The voice is an instrument, it's like a piano you know, people would not stand on a stage with a piano if they've never seen one before and never practised one before, and never went to a lesson. You know, they just wouldn't do it, yet people try to do this with voice all the time - this is something I feel very strongly about. When you go to have your voice trained, they don't give you anything that you haven't already got. What they do is they strip your voice back down. You see, as you're singing for years and years you start liking the way Bryan Ferry would say 'chair' or the way Bowie would say 'love' or the way Mick Jagger would say 'door' or the way somebody else would say something else and you develop what's known as a vocal vocabulary, right. So a bloke from Cork maybe, (sings) "Well I couldn't know if you were never there, you could.....", and you're saying "Nah. Nah, he's not from Cork". You know the Cork people don't speak like that, but you have all this bullshit and you start sounding like all your heroes. Now when you go to singing lessons and training, what you do is they strip all that shit away and you get back to what Christy Dignam sounds like. And that's why the biggest compliment anybody has ever paid me is when people have come up to me after a gig and they'd say, "When you hear your voice, you'd know it's you." That's all I ever want to be, is just myself. That's what I try and do in the music. I'd never write a song about an experience that I haven't actually experienced myself, so when I'm up there what I'm saying is, my name is Christy Dignam, I'm a rock singer, and this is how I feel about this. But I'm not saying to you, you should feel this way. I'm just saying that's how I feel about it.

Sometimes something pisses me off and I feel like singing about it and musically, at this point in the fucking century, it's fairly unchic or un-trendy to be protesting about anything because it's been done before you know, and that's where people fuck up all the time in music, they think that because it's been said before, because I'm a singer, I need to be saying something new, right, but if it was said by Bob Dylan and nothing has changed, why the fuck move, do you know what



I mean?

You move on when something has changed and that's the way I feel about it. I'm sincere about my beliefs and I don't have a haphazard belief. If somebody asks me a question that I don't know about, that I haven't researched myself in my own mind or whatever, I won't answer it until I have an opinion on it. I don't throw opinions around unless I believe in them. I don't believe I'm right in everything I say, do you know what I mean? That's a strong point.

**Was there anything recorded after the 'Feel No Shame' album?**

Yeah, there's a lot of stuff.

**What happened to that? Did it just fall by the wayside?**

Well, some of it. We had a single called 'Don't Make Me Cry Again' which was their first single when I split with them. I've a version of that at home, that we wrote with me singing on it and stuff and then they lifted my vocal off and put Eamo's vocal on so...

**Did you actually write the lyrics, do the credits say Dignam or whatever?**

Yeah.

*"There were a lot of rumours going around that I was strung out on smack and my voice was gone..."*

**So then your first solo single was the double A-sided 'Chasing Shadows' and 'One Man's Dream'.**

With Aslan we had what every band in this country aspire to, we had a record deal, we had an album that went gold, it went to number one after a week, we'd two hit singles at the one time, we'd hit singles starting to happen in Germany and America. Everything was there and I was still one of the unhappiest people in the country. So all that doesn't mean a fucking thing. You have to be happy in here. So that's what 'One Man's Dream' was about, that kind of basic vibe. I felt a lot of bitterness towards Aslan and about the way the whole thing worked out and the way I was the one that was crucified in the papers and they weren't touched and so I felt really pissed off about it. That bitterness I felt was eating me up. It wasn't doing anything to them, it was fucking killing me, so I had to exorcise if you like, had to get it out of me so I picked up a guitar and I played two chords and I wrote 'Chasing Shadows' and it took about ten minutes to write the whole song. Now, say if a record company says, right we need a new song, write a new single, and I got home on a Friday night at 9 o'clock and I'm sitting in the same sitting-room, pick up the same guitar, you can't do it again, you can't call it up, do you know what I

mean? It happens when it's ready to happen. That was almost immediately after I split from Aslan, that was released. And then I couldn't do anything for a long time. The reason I released it was because there were a lot of rumours going around that I was strung out on smack and my voice was gone and I was this and I was that. So, I wanted to disprove that, you know, by putting something out.

**So at what stage did you actually come off drugs? Was that around this time or before Aslan split?**

It was after the Aslan split, you know there's a load of.....

*"He stripped me off and just done the business."*

**Between Aslan and the single?**

Yeah, I was just, you know, the whole thing was just... I don't now, I mean I went to the clinic and stuff, you know, the Rutland Centre in Dublin. They put your whole life under a microscope, and you start admitting your defects in your personality and everybody has them you know, like I started remembering things that had happened to me throughout my life that I had completely forgot, not forgotten but just blocked out as if they never happened. It was painful for me to look at this so I kind of pushed it away. Now, had I went through that pain and looked at it then, I would have never got into the drugs thing, but because I was putting it off it was always there, it was always niggling at the back of my mind and when you, when I took drugs, all these little things were just gone, they just vanished for that few hours and that few hours peace to me was worth everything I was losing because at least I had peace.

It didn't matter if I lost everything because it wasn't making me happy anyway.

When I was about six or seven a bloke on the road sent me to the shops for a Coca Cola or something, and I came back and the door was open, he says "Come in", so I went in and he shut the door behind me and he stripped me off, took my laces off my shoes and tied me to a chair and just fucking done the business and I remember after, I had to break my laces to get them off, I had to cut them, and when I went home I was asked "What happened to you laces?" and my mother started fucking clattering me and stuff for me wrecking my laces and I was afraid to tell her what happened to them, cos I felt guilty, I felt I'd done something wrong, you know. It happened again about two or three years later.

**NEXT WEEK: CHRISTY TALKS ABOUT HIS MUSICAL INFLUENCES AND WORKING WITH CONOR GOFF. CONOR GOFF TELLS EXACTLY WHO HE IS!**



19/12/90

# Christy Dignam Interview PART 2

MUSIC SEAGT100N

LAST WEEK IN THIS CANDID INTERVIEW CHRISTY DIGNAM SPOKE OF THE ASLAN SPLIT, HIS BELIEFS AND HIS DRUG ADDICTION. THE SAGA CONTINUES.....

**The next thing you did musically was to tour solo, wasn't it?**  
Yeah.

**You used to do 'Young Americans'.**  
That's right.

**Was Bowie a big influence in your life?**  
Yeah, when I was a kid I loved him. The first record I ever bought was a song called 'Life On Mars'. In my whole life there's been about four songs that I've heard that have literally changed my fucking life the moment I heard them and that's the power of music, that's the very reason I decided that I was going to dedicate my life to music. There was nothing else that ever occurred to me to do, this was what I was going to do and that was it, you know.

*"It makes you feel good if you can pass that feeling on to somebody."*

The thing that happened to me with Bowie that day, when I listened to 'Life On Mars', I wanted to be able to give that to somebody, right. Now I was talking to a bloke last week, it was after the debate (Philosoph) we were sitting in the bar in UCC and he said something to me about 'This Is'. He buys albums or something, he never buys singles and it was the only single he ever bought. That fucking blitzed me, you know. When that happens it makes you feel good about yourself, and if you can pass that feeling on to somebody, and remember your man said "What about the punters" at the debate, that's what it is!

*"If I can make an album as good as 'This Is The Sea', I don't care if it never sells a copy."*

I listened to 'This Is The Sea' a couple of years ago, and that day, I'll never forget it, I was on the North Circular Road in Dublin and I was in a bloke's flat and he played it and I said to myself

*"Right, that's it. If I can make an album that sounds as good as this album I don't care if it never sells a copy", cos if somebody came into my home and I played it for them, I'd know that they could say "Well I don't like the music", but they couldn't say anything about the quality of it, you know. It'd be a quality fuckin' album.*

**Getting back to Bowie, you supported him in Slane in '87, didn't you?**

That's right. There were 40,000 people at that. We went out to play on the same stage as Bowie and the thing that blew me away about that gig, the one moment in it was we had a song called 'Sands of Time', it's on 'Feel No Shame' and there's a part in it where it kind of does a (sings) "When I walk and I get this feeling....". The song drops and it builds back up again on one of these rolls, so I'm standing there at the front of the stage, the song drops and I turn around and as I turn around at the side of the stage was a guy called Carlos Alamor....

**He's Bowie's guitarist.**  
Yeah, and Peter Frampton right. Carlos Alamor had a walking stick, he was standing (like that), and I'll never forget it, and as the roll started to go you could see him and Peter Frampton looking at each other. And then when the song exploded they just looked at each other and they, you know, (nods), as if that was fucking good. Now when you have people of that quality saying what you're doing is good, if that hadn't happened, the gig would have been just, I mean it was a great gig, it was an honour to play it but it was a gig. I've played gigs with Conor with just the two of us doing this acoustic thing that I've enjoyed more than that gig, you now.

*"My head was up my arse after the Aslan thing."*

**The next thing you did musically was with Conor Goff. How did you meet him?**

Well, we knew each other from Dublin - I always liked what Conor did. When I was in Aslan, we were in Los Angeles and myself and Conor went out one night together. We were driving around in this car, we were looking for an off-licence actually, but Conor was playing me a tape of the stuff that he was doing over there and I fucking thought it was brilliant, you know, so then when I got the band together after Aslan, the solo band if you like, I wasn't into the 'Christy Dignam and his Band' vibe, it reminded me of 'Dickie Rock and his Band' or something. My head was up my arse after the Aslan thing, cos it took a long time to get over it. I was still in the mourning stage and I was doing gigs and stuff just to prove to people that I wasn't dead which was the wrong reason. I should have been going out because this is what I want to do. So, I stopped that, I was in a bit of a limbo, I didn't know what I was going to do. I met a friend of



**"I couldn't believe the hostility we received in the rock media."**

Conor's over in Dublin and I asked him what Conor was doing. Conor was doing some work over in the States so I gave him my number to get Conor to give me a ring cos I couldn't get in touch with him. So Conor gave me a ring. We had about five conversations on the phone and we just talked about what ideas he had and what ideas I had, so Conor decided to come home last Christmas and we said we'd give it a go for about a year, see how things worked out.

**"My doubts were really dropped when we came down here.... this is a great abum."**

So, we got the set together and went out and I couldn't believe the fucking hostility we received from the media, you know. And I'm not talking about the tabloid press or anything, I'm talking about the rock fucking media, they were saying complete mismatch, and they were telling us how wrong it was and it wasn't going to work and we were wankers and the two of us were has beens and stuff like this. So that kind of got my goat up because from the time I was fucking 16 or 17, starting in fucking bands, I've been told that I've been pissing into the wind and it was never going to happen and all this, and that's what made Aslan fucking happen because I was so fucking determined to prove these people wrong, you now. So when this happened again it was almost the fuel I needed really. There were times, to be honest with you, when you start bleeding thinking "Maybe they're fucking right, you know, maybe this is a fucking mistake".

My doubts were really dropped when we came down here. We started the album, we just said "Fuck it man, this is a fucking great album", and it is! It's a rock album and not going to be something that's kind of off the wall or anything like that, but it's just different. There's quality musicianship on it, like Conor's a great guitar player, there's great guitar playing on it, there's great singing on it, and the songs are great you know.

**What do you think of the music around today?**

This Manchester vibe with this wah-wah guitar right, there's a hundred bands in Dublin now, and even successful bands like The Honeythieves who just fucking do this, just.... for me it's just doing what Marc Bolan and all those other people done fucking 15 years ago. I'm saying, "What's the fucking point in doing that?"

**"I wouldn't be able to live with myself doing Jason Donovan songs... all I try and do is make quality music."**

**Well if people buy it....**

Yeah, you see, that's the thing isn't it? If that's what you're into it for.... Half of these bands aren't worth pissing time, you know, there's no substance, there's no quality in what they do. I mean Jesus Christ, it doesn't take a genius to write stuff that's in the charts. You could do it, but I mean I'd have to, in a few years time, hand my grand-children the records I made when I was a young fellow and I'm not going to hand them Jason Donovan songs. It's as simple as that. I wouldn't be able to live with myself doing that shit, you know, so what we're trying to do is almost a continuation of the Aslan thing, cos all I try and do is make quality music and sometimes that quality doesn't appeal to the masses, perhaps. I don't really give a fuck.

With that, Christy left to finish some vocals, leaving me with Conor Goff, who had returned from an unsuccessful day's shooting ("I'm really fucking wrecked!").

Conor Goff is a veteran of the business having started as the singer/guitarist with the G-Squad and then going solo, having his biggest hit with 'Everybody Wants To Live In America'. Chrystalis Records offered him a deal which he turned down, but signed with Siren, releasing a single called 'Reunion'. Chrystalis records offered him another deal, Billy Idol wanted two of his songs (one of which is on Christy & Conor's new album) and things were going great until his attorney advised him not to sign. He formed a new band touring the west coast of the States with Hothouse Flowers until a motorbike accident finished that. No sooner had he recovered than Christy Dignam rang him and the rest is Rock 'n Roll history!

Conor made me a cup of tea. I asked him about touring with the stars (Phil Lynott: "Brilliant, my hero.", Tina Turner: "She's a complete bitch, she wants everything done for her.", Bryan Adams: "Fantastic, fucking wonderful person.") and we talked about playing guitar ("I've been playing since I was about 16") and his hopes for the future ("Hopefully we're going to licence this album out world-wide.")

As I prepared to leave, Ian Dempsey's 'Talkabout' was the entertainment of the moment. Suddenly Conor jumped out of his seat shouting "Tony, you mule! Jesus, Tony!" Conor's squash partner was having his 15 minutes. Thanking Conor, I left to try to find mine! Christy Dignam and Conor Goff play the College Bar on January 31st.

FERGAL KAVANAGH

MISSING SREGTIDON