

TO HEAR KNOWS WHEN - GREAT IRISH ALBUMS REVISITED

Ghostown by The Radiators

Thin Lizzy's *Bad Reputation* tour ended in December 1977 with two shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon. It was at an aftershow party following the second of these gigs that The Radiators, the young Dublin punk band who supported Lizzy on the tour, first met Tony Visconti. The legendary Bowie and Bolan producer liked what he'd heard. He agreed to produce the band's next album and told them to go away and write a couple of hits.

"When Tony Visconti asks you to write a couple of hits, you are duly obliged to do so, remembers The Radiators' Pete Holidai. "When we came back to Ireland, I wrote 'Million Dollar Hero' and Philip [Chevron] wrote 'Walking Home Alone Again'. We demoed them in a cow shed out in Robertstown, Co. Kildare where my parents were living at the time."

Visconti liked the demos. Over a few weeks in the first half of 1978 The Radiators recorded with Visconti at his Good Earth Studios in London. "When I saw The Radiators they were young and inexperienced, but I am pleased with the studio results", Visconti told *Music Week* in October 1978. "The band have all the great harmonies that the Irish seem to have, and they are very strong on verse too." After nearly a 12-month delay, *Ghostown* was released in August 1979.

It was acclaimed by some quarters of the music press but it confused most others. *Ghostown* disappeared quickly. Its reputation has grown every year since. "I love the unselfconscious Irishness that pervades it



all," wrote *Melody Maker's* Carol Clerk of the 1989 reissue. "The Radiators cast a critical eye over a decaying Dublin, and consider the hypocrisies of a nation haunted still by the ghosts of the old saints and scholars."

Chevron (who sadly passed away in 2013) joined The Pogues after his time in The Radiators. He would often answer questions on The Pogues forum. "Ghostown was structured as a sort of midnight walk through Dublin by a contemporary Irish teenager," he wrote. "In this context, the kid (Johnny Jukebox) finds solace and inspiration in the ghosts of Dublin's past who accompany him on his midnight walks, the poets, patriots, priests, panhandlers and prostitutes of a Dublin which once dreamed of greatness. Johnny considers these characters to be more vibrant, more full of life, than the dull and authoritarian and punitive church/state consensus will allow in contemporary Ireland."

The artistic leap The Radiators made between their debut and *Ghostown* is extraordinary. "No Irish band has ever attempted anything as ambitious as *Ghostown*, and no one ever will," wrote George Byrne in 1998. "Why should it?" It has been done and, like *Pet Sounds*, it's a monument forever."



Pete Holidai revisits *Ghostown* on *To Hear Knows When - Great Irish Albums Revisited*, available on all podcast platforms. Episode notes and further info: www.paulmcdermott.ie/podcast

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