

A progressive rock album of 'beautiful sounds'? Sure, if the artist is JC Harris. This sixth album of original songs by the Irish singer/multi-instrumentalist contains some of the prettiest melodies you're likely to hear this year. And although prog isn't usually thought of in terms of brevity, this album is all about well-crafted songs. "All the greats did miniatures every bit as deep as their large pieces. Despite the image 'prog' has for some, size doesn't matter," says Harris with a smile.

But it wouldn't be a JCHMusic record without intricate arrangements, virtuoso playing and intelligent lyrics blending classical, jazz, Irish and rock traditions together in a seamless whole. As usual, topics range far and wide from the serious (recent wars) to the comic (an unusual strategy for coping with lumbar trauma.) But hidden inside these often quirky—but very approachable songs—are all manner of politics and psychology. This is meant to be 'subversive' stuff. "That's a huge thing in Irish literature; a song might appear to be about a love-sick boy when underneath it's really trying foment an uprising!" Harris explains. "What I try to do is like in opera; you tell two sides of a story. The words give you what a character says, but often the orchestra tells you what he really means. Both have to be equal partners to give you the whole truth."

That's a high bar for any artist. And at first blush, the single and video *It's a Racket* seems like just another anti-war song. But actually, it's about the lack of seriousness most of us have about the war. "The point isn't the recent corruption and overreaching—that's too easy," says Harris. "It's about the apparent lack of will we have to do anything about it." The tone is a slow, almost country style that hints at where so much of the faux patriotism comes from.

Remembering the album title, not everything is cynical. *Twenty Years* deals with love, or rather, the need to value love all the more as we age. It has an optimistic feel and a bright guitar solo, but underneath there's also a warning: make the most of what you have and don't discard it so easily. As the refrain states, "It might take twenty years to find your heart again."

Now it just wouldn't be 'prog' without an epic. And the title work *Beautiful Sounds*, as its name implies, may be JC's most accessible long-form piece yet. The themes are memorable with a real plan and the playing, while intricate, never becomes mere 'shredding'. The haunting build-up to the finale ("The Well") is particularly moving, with some of JC's most passionate lyrics to date.

Eclecticism may not be the current fashion with most record companies looking for a stock 'sound'. But JC Harris embraces



variety – even in the instruments he plays. "I grew up with groups like The Beatles and Moody Blues. They always covered a lot of ground." To that end, JC made almost all the noises you hear, including a variety of electric and acoustic guitars, electric and upright basses, an old Ludwig 'Ringo' drum kit and a galaxy of electronic keyboards. Less common instruments include the Irish whistle (featured on 'Crossing The Shannon...') and a remarkable array of home-made drums and percussion which form the backbone of 'Beautiful Sounds'. Even more unusual these days, everything is played in real time without loops or other electronic trickery. Despite current tendency to use digital wizardry and make everything 'better than life,' JC sticks to the old-school mantra of 'keeping it real'.

While bucking so many trends, is JC worried about 'marketability'? "To me, a musician should try to play more than one note, regardless of fashion." Then to avoid sounding too preachy, "I gotta be meeeeee!" he croons with a laugh. Indeed. There is no other music quite like this. And with its broad selection of truly engaging songs, *Beautiful Sounds* is the best introduction yet to the wide world of JCHMusic.

Growing up in Galway, Ireland, JC learned traditional music on guitar and whistle. As a teen he moved to the U.S. where he studied music at the University of Minnesota. There he was the youngest member of the Dale Warland Singers and helped start the influential punk band Husker Dü. He gained notoriety as side-man to a variety of acts in the 1980's including jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis, blues legend Son Seals, The Four Tops, the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show and many Broadway musicals playing, as he says, "pretty much anything with strings and a pick" before a rare form of arthritis put his career on long-term hold. During that 15-year break from performing, he launched a successful software company and then in 2000 quit to launch his solo career with his first album 'Positive'. He currently lives and records in Dublin IE and Seattle, WA, where *Beautiful Sounds* was made over the course of 2008.

All six of his albums, including **Beautiful Sounds**, are available via Amazon.Com, iTunes and jchMusic.com. For an online Media Kit, including lyrics, reviews, instruments and most recent videos, go to www.jchmusic.com/mediakit