

The Daily Shift Interview 4th Feb 2013

Interview: Southern Tenant Folk Union

Posted by [Mark Roche](#) on [February 4, 2013](#) in [Music](#)

Southern Tenant Folk Union are an award-winning roots band with an original spin on tradition music. **Mark Roche** of *The Daily Shift* caught up with banjo player and vocalist, Pat McGarvey for a quick chat before they begin their Irish tour for *Hello Cold, Goodbye Sun* released today...



Americana Artist of the Year 2010 and pioneering roots act, Southern Tenant Folk Union have just released their 6 album, *Hello cold, Goodbye Sun* to critical acclaim. Their dark arrangements coupled with acoustic wizardry and intelligent lyricism promotes a record full of ambient space; rather than burn, this album smoulders with an intensity often missing from groups of their genre. It's certainly a must-listen and the most original folk album I've heard in quite a while. Check below this interview with Pat McGarvey for details of their Irish tour.

You guys have been around for quite a while, how did Southern Tenant Folk Union come together?

Well I mean, I was a member of a band years ago called The Coal Porters. I originally played bass you see and I was based in London. I basically thought that we needed a stronger lead singer and I was kind of frustrated. Eventually I decided to start my own sort of side project; we began collecting members and the line-up has changed since but I was fired from The Coal Porters and we began playing as Southern Tenant Folk Union.

So I guess, you feel more fulfilled with Southern Tenant Folk Union?

Definitely, I mean I certainly feel as if I have more control and the funny thing is I'm grateful to the past and The Coal Porters, I spent a lot of time with those guys and they were the band I first toured Ireland with.

Each time I've listened to the album I've heard something new, is that the magic of having so many members?

Yeah, I mean the funny thing is it's a blessing and a curse. It really benefits the band by bringing in different talents and the individual persons ideas but it can also add to frustration. It's very easy to be heard but difficult to

agree upon things with so many people with a certain idea in their head. I mean we had 35 tracks written for this album, whittled it down to 15 and then eventually the 12 that appear on *Hello Cold, Goodbye Sun*. It's a sort of brutal approach but it's certainly gives you the best material for an album.

So what do you listen to at home?

I listen to a lot of movie soundtracks. I bought a vinyl not too long ago, it's from *Halloween 3* which is the only one without the masked killer, Michael Myers. John Carpenter produced that movie but he also scored the film. It's really weird, lots of synths and odd things going on there. I also listen to a lot of Soul and Punk; I mean here's the thing, there's good music and there's bad music. I listen to good music haha.

I'm glad you said that, I am a Dexter fanatic and felt that any of your songs could have been overlaid in the show; the darkness is perfect for the show not to mention the track 'Dark Passenger'.

Well Carrie Thomas who wrote that song is actually a very big Dexter fan and that's a direct reference to the show. I've seen a couple of episodes but not as many as I like, I have a long list of things I need to watch that I'll eventually get to but I have two small children as well. I don't have as much time as I'd like.

Hello Cold, Goodbye Sun has a very dark theme running throughout doesn't it?

Yes it does definitely; I pitched it at a writing session that we should aim for a sort of Modern Horror theme. –

Even still, some tracks have really happy melodies, was it difficult to juxtapose both? Not particularly difficult, I mean if you take 'Men in Robes' for example; it has a really happy melody and sounds really energetic but with that track I wanted to portray a very contemporary sense of horror. The lack of control is a very current feeling among us all and while we thought we had a lot of control the bankers were tying up our money and now we have lost all control. That's a pretty scary thought and the men in robes are a modern horror story.

I thought the album was a pretty confident release. It doesn't demand anything other than to be listened to, it sort of smoulders, right?

Haha I guess it does. I think recording an album is a very different experience to performing one, in the same sense a live show sounds different to a recording. You're in no hurry with an album, at least we weren't and whether you're listening to it in the car or at home, we felt we don't have to slap you in the face with it for you to hear what we wanted to do.

We still do the knee-slapping bluegrass thing live and the new tracks too, it's very cool to be able to do both I think; we enjoyed experimenting with different arrangements that were spacious and ambient. It's the same as the difference between actors from theatre and the movies; while one is very over-acted and full of large gestures (live performance) the recorded performance on the big screen is a lot more subtle, it doesn't need to say as much and still delivers the same message.

So you start your tour this Thursday in Dundalk and you're pretty busy for the next 10 days?

Yeah we really can't wait to get back to Ireland, we're going to be run off our feet with radio appearances and the shows of course but we cannot wait to perform for you guys. We really love playing over here. We're a hardworking band and I did all the PR for the album in the UK, we hired the wonderful Anne Marie Walsh for Ireland who's done a fantastic job for us but our main aim is to just be a really great live band, which I think we are. We're an independent band that get paid to play, and everything we earn is put straight back into the band. People are working hard to pay to come to our shows, we want to entertain them and show them a good time so we really have no other choice; we love what we do and at the end of the day, when you're happy doing that, there's nothing else really. – **And Irish fans are great aren't they?** Yeah I mean, there's lots of places we've played and as you said earlier, people like to enjoy themselves. People love to dance and the people that get drunk and enjoy themselves really enjoy themselves, then there are the people that come for the music; I don't

mean this in a bad sense but there are the pretentious music folk who are more cerebral about the experience and that's great to. Any audience suits us because we put so much into our shows for the fans.

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