

## [Chuck-ing ideas around](#)

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*David Hennessy chats to Pat McGarvey of Southern Tenant Folk Union, the folk collective whose new album, *The Chuck Norris Project*, which deals with political issues like gun control and zero hour contracts*

“I had the idea: Let’s do an album of political songs named after this right wing politically active movie actor,” begins Southern Tenant Folk Union founder Pat McGarvey, speaking about the collective’s new album, *The Chuck Norris Project*.

All the album’s tracks are named after different movies from the actor’s career but have nothing to do with the plots. Each song takes the title as a starting point to discuss political ideas.

Band leader Pat McGarvey, born in Belfast, came upon the idea in autumn 2012 during the last US presidential election when Mr Norris and his wife released a campaign video urging voters to come out for Mitt Romney saying that a vote for Obama would lead to “a thousand years of darkness”, a statement he felt unhelpful to the debate.

“I thought that sounds crazy but it’s so crazy it should be done. It’s the sort of idea you should follow through. I tested it out first by writing five or six songs and seeing if they were any good before I inflicted it on the band but once I realised, ‘this is going to work musically as well as thematically’, I pushed ahead. It was a tough album to make and there’s some challenging music on there but it’s rewarding, I think if you give the album a few listens and get people into it.”



The subjects of the songs are diverse but have subtle and common threads linking them outside of the framing device. A few songs touch on the gun laws in USA and their consequences, one being the continuing horror of school shootings (in Slaughter In San Francisco) written from the point of view of a young girl trapped in time beneath her desk.

Pat, who lived in America, explains: “Americans are very friendly and very nice but you get onto talking about politics or religion, they’re so far away from how we discuss these issues in Europe.

“Whenever there were mass killings with automatic weapons in Hungerford and then Dunblane, it didn’t take long for the government to react. America’s had so many of those incidents but the gun lobby is so strong, they haven’t been able to do anything about it. It’s based around American politics because of the Chuck Norris framing device but most of these issues apply to our country and political system too. We’re all connected globally anyway.”

Although Slaughter in San Francisco is not based on a real atrocity, does it carry some responsibility for Pat to handle it sensitively? “I think it does come with a responsibility and sometimes I do think: How dare I write a song about people hiding under a desk in that situation? I think it’s the one that asks the most responsibility from the songwriter than all of the other ones because I’m not in that situation, I wouldn’t want to be, I wouldn’t want my children to be and I can’t imagine how frightened and scared you would be but it is a fact that young people in schools have had to go through this and it continues.

“I thought about it recently, just last month there was that school shooting in Pakistan so it’s not just a problem in America. Why people can’t just discuss things without bringing violence into it, I don’t know. Maybe the song is a little contribution to the debate, certainly I would hope sensitively. The title is kind of insensitive, Slaughter in San Francisco but that’s the exploitation movie genre.”

Equality is another thread linking the songs with zero hour contracts and the need to organise labour the basis for the song Delta Force (referencing Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World caste system) and the forces ranged against it in The Octagon. Appropriately

for a band named for a union they present in Expendable Too a scenario where workers decide to reverse the norm and outsource their Managing Director's job.

What sort of reaction has Pat found to the album name? Does The Chuck Norris Project get people asking questions immediately?

"I made it fairly clear that it is a framing device really but ultimately some people will assume that I just love the movies of Chuck Norris and all the songs are about his movies. Some people will get that impression. Most people though have picked up on the political angle and seen what we're trying to do.

"The reaction has been good, the reviews have been good except for one and I've decided to ignore that one."

What about the reaction of the actor himself or more to the point of his people? "I shouldn't think he would (notice). There's probably things named after him all the time. I would hope as a political thinker himself, he agrees with the idea that we're allowed to discuss any issue we want. I can disagree with him, he can disagree with me.

"I do like his action movies, they're fun to watch. I've no personal beef with Chuck Norris, I just disagree with him politically, as do many people. Most people in the UK, even if they're on the right would be far to the left of Chuck Norris, if not him personally, that evangelical right movement in America."

**For the full interview, see the January 31 Irish World.**

**Southern Tenant Folk Union play The Lighthouse Arts Centre, Poole on Wed 28<sup>th</sup> Jan, Watermark Arts Centre, Ivybridge on Thu 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis on Fri 30<sup>th</sup> Jan, South Street arts centre, Reading on Sat 31<sup>st</sup> Jan, Ent Shed, Bedford on Thu 5<sup>th</sup> Feb, Kings Place, London on Fri 6<sup>th</sup> Feb, Courtyard Theatre, Hereford on Thu 12<sup>th</sup> Feb, Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot on Fri 13<sup>th</sup> Feb, Acorn Theatre, Penzance on Sat 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, Kitchen Garden Café, Birmingham on Sun 15<sup>th</sup> Feb.**

**They also play several Irish dates in March.**

**For more information, go to [www.southerntenantfolkunion.com](http://www.southerntenantfolkunion.com).**

<http://www.theirishworld.com/?p=13230>