

## Music

## De Profundis

*A man's very highest moment is, I have no doubt at all, when he kneels in the dust, and beats his breast, and tells all the sins of his life. — Oscar Wilde*

Steven Patrick Morrissey has always been honest, and the title of his new record (set for release in September) 'Years of Refusal' is an honest and simple, yet powerful statement, and more than that, a kind of manifesto. It has been almost two years since he has performed back in Ireland, and in those two years he has been called upon to defend himself more than once, as well as enjoying a hugely successful international tour and a number of hit singles; but it is really what happens between the spaces of those events that is most interesting, and again, to quote Wilde – 'one's real life is so often the life that one does not lead.'

today, and while some things have changed such as his ever-more-interesting solo career, some things remain the same, such as his heart, which is still as open as the sea. This has always been evident from his lyrics, but also through smaller, less-reported kindnesses such as his contribution last year to the Salford Lads Club (to make much-needed repairs) which was featured in the artwork for The Smiths' seminal 1986 album 'The Queen is Dead', and shows that Morrissey has not forgotten.

There are several more examples like this, but instead

Though Morrissey and Marr enjoyed the most electric of artistic relationships, Morrissey's solo work still contains some of that electricity; that fire.

That 'fire' is also evident in a band Morrissey has loved from his teenage years – The New York Dolls, and something that would have seemed impossible to the teenage Morrissey – that they might support him in concert one day, has actually come true. Morrissey must sometimes smile at the brilliant poetry of it all, in testament to his hard-won efforts over the years. The efforts that have taken him from the fan running the

the first disciple of Jesus to receive the martyr's crown, and St. Stephen's Day in Ireland comes after Christmas Day - and following Jesus is not a bad career's work. In any case, Morrissey has now added to the mythology behind the name, making it more palatable for others, and shows that while you may be unhappy with various things you had no control over growing up; the name you were given, the place you went to school – you can transcend all of this in order to make your own, more authentic personal history, which Morrissey's music will always probably continue to explore.

one's inner life, the imaginative and emotional, the private seas and storms, the divided self. This world, the life that we strive for, dream of, work towards, is sometimes the life 'one does not lead' yet it is key to understanding Morrissey, if in fact that can really ever be done, since life is also about getting to grips with the most complex relationship of all: the one with yourself. This is the relationship Morrissey explores in acute detail on almost every record – with the human condition in its most fragile, mysterious state, as a kind of touchstone.

Some of Morrissey's experiences in the past two years have served to remind those that might have forgotten that he is still as relevant as ever, which will always be the case, because the impulse he is working from now is the same one he was working from when he first began making music – to make sense of this life, with its protean nature, its fallibility, complexity, tragedy, and all those spaces in-between; the matters of the heart, family, politics, philosophy, friendships, art, the thoughts that occur between waking and sleeping, the mundane to the extraordinary – they are all present in his body of work.

His curious and adventurous nature, (by his own assertion he's "a traveller to the grave") has given us newer, ever richer material in the past few years, spearheaded by 2004's 'You are the Quarry', and followed by 2006's 'Ringleader of the Tormentors' with anticipation for September's 'Years of Refusal' as the kind surrounding the third time Ali met Frazier in the ring. In fact, much of Morrissey's output could be viewed in terms of boxing, especially as Joyce Carol Oates has said, that 'boxing is about being hit rather more than it is about hitting, just as it is about feeling pain'. Which filters into the biggest misconception about Morrissey, that he is always fiercely combative, looking for a fight, when in fact most of the time he is either reacting, or simply and intelligently putting his point across – yet artful discourse is too-often unwelcome in this saturated world. When Morrissey wrote 'The World is Full of Crashing Bores' perhaps he was observing the 'race to the bottom' that is partly present in today's culture in terms of media and society's preoccupations, and though he has previously suggested that he is not overtly political, his sensibility is so attuned that his commentary always contains a political dimension that works itself through.

The Morrissey that appeared for the first time on 'Top of the Pops' in 1983 as part of The Smiths (replete with gladioli and a hearing aid) is still the Morrissey of

stood, particularly in terms of the media. However, the injustice he feels at being misunderstood has been evidenced by his launching of legal action against the NME and its editor for defamation last year, and more recently, he won a partly similar case against the music magazine *Word*, which was forced to issue an English high court apology. While Morrissey has a delicate nature, he twins this with innate strength and refuses to be used by the press in order to boost sales, as he says himself in 'Irish Blood, English Heart' – 'no regime can buy or sell me'. This 'refusal' is also present in his identity, what people think he represents is often the converse, or certainly more layered, more complex. However, it seems clear, albeit in a subtle way, that his Irishness and private relationship to Ireland is important to him, perhaps even central to his identity, though he has no need to fly a flag, since it is too precious for that. This relationship to Ireland is possibly bound up with his long-held fascination with the outsider (since he is one) such as James Dean, the New York Dolls and through sometimes working with people that have interesting identities also, such as the Italian-American producer Tony Visconti.

By looking at artists Morrissey admires, it can tell a great deal about who Morrissey is, because it is through our own heroes that we see something of ourselves. When Morrissey sang 'Pasolini is me' on 'You Have Killed Me', he was pointing us towards the great Italian director, but more than that, to consider his way of thinking. Pasolini – another great, complex man, who also spent years refusing in order to create both art and interesting discourse, once said (in a documentary made about him in the 1960's) – 'The mark which has dominated all my work is this longing for life, this sense of exclusion, which doesn't lessen but augments this love of life' – surely the same could be said of Morrissey?

When Johnny Marr (néé Maher) sought Morrissey out over twenty-five years ago, turning up at his door unannounced, he was looking for the lad that had inhabited Manchester's postpunk music scene for some time, who he had briefly said hello to at a Patti Smith concert in 1978. That day was a fateful one, and established a common ground between the two that dazzlingly coalesced to produce The Smiths, and their consequently seminal, and ultimately poetic work. Though Marr and Morrissey do not collaborate anymore (we can pray to St. Jude in the hope) they still share that common ground – and their principled relationship to music remains evolving, but as passionate as ever.

this is life's poetry – practical and yet ethereal. Upon another viewing of Greg Whiteley's brilliant documentary 'New York Doll' about Dolls bassist Arthur "Killer" Kane, what moves most is the gentle nature of Kane, Johansen and Sylvain – who are all so different in their preoccupations, influences, outlooks, but who are similarly gentle, and loving – this must really have resonated with Morrissey, since he too, contains this gentleness, and, like the Dolls, has a desire to put something different and interesting out there, and has the ability to carry it through. His role in bringing the Dolls' back together is probably something he would like to play down, but his influence has been felt before, whether through 'Meat is Murder', (often referenced as inspiring many to become vegetarians) or the impact he (in both The Smiths and solo) has had on novels, plays, musical theatre, visual art, poetry, film and music. However, part of Morrissey's strength is his humour about the fact that his lonely teenager has become a subject of adulation. It is this friction, the life 'one does not lead' that continues to propel him on to even greater heights. The man who always saw himself "permanently standing outside the stage door" is now the artist people are waiting for on the street, yet Morrissey is there too – one foot in the street, and one in the universe. He will never lose the ability to communicate, and while various aspects of his identity have undoubtedly formed who he is, he still retains the ability to transcend nationality, language, and boundaries to communicate with a world that, more than ever, needs his kind of nature – 'nature is a language, can't you read?'

The older we all get, the more important Morrissey becomes, for he has an ability to strike straight to meaning, and to work within the parameters of Liam Clancy's world – 'No Fear. No Envy. No Meanness', it appears that the problems arise when these three tenets are not observed by others; then he is compelled to react. It will be interesting to see what his new record will disseminate, if 'All You Need is Me' is indication, then it is a further kick against the Establishment, and a championing of the power of being individual, of embracing destiny, of not being afraid to speak out, because as the Italian children's choir joyously sing on 'The Youngest Was the Most Loved' – 'there is no such thing in life as normal', yet so often acceptance of that irrefutable fact is not observed.

Many years ago Morrissey indicated that he did not like his forename Steven – but whether spelt with a 'v' or 'ph' it has good connotations, since St. Stephen was

certainly contained elements of topicality (for example, on 'America is not the World'), it also contained some of the old, ever-present wounds. 'I'm Not Sorry' has always intrigued and resonated, since it seems to provide a kind of stripped down version of Morrissey: 'on returning, I can't believe this world is still turning, / the pressure's on, because the pleasure hasn't gone, / and I'm not sorry for the things I've done, and I'm not looking for...just anyone' as well as providing philosophical yearning: 'On competing: oh when will this tired heart stop beating? It's all a game, existence is only a game...I'm slipping below the water line', emotional fragility: 'reach for my hand, and the race is won, reject my hand, and the damage is done' and his honest, yet mordantly witty observation: 'The woman of my dreams, she never came along. The woman of my dreams, well...there never was one.'

So much is contained in those lines, he is conveying so much for us all and in a sense *from* us all, part of Morrissey's power is that he almost seems to be channelling some of our concerns and conceits: the things we do not say to people, the unrequited love, the political commentary, the questioning of faith – but it needs to be said, and sometimes it feels as if Morrissey is engaging in a kind of Georgie Hyde-Lees/ Yeats-inspired automatic writing experiment. 'The wild man' in his head, is the one that is present in all of us, though often only he dares to call it out. And when people react against him, they are ultimately reacting against themselves; against an intelligent debate about the human condition, and human nature.

Sometimes the key to Morrissey's heart is in the title of his works, just like one of his favourite writers Oscar Wilde. While 'De Profundis' discussed spirituality, faith, love and tragedy – it was simply, powerfully, and like most of Morrissey's work – 'From the Depths' – Siobhán Kane

**Morrissey, supported by the New York Dolls, plays the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin 8, on Saturday 28th June. Gates open at 5pm. Tickets are €55, available from Road, City Discs, Sound Cellar and usual outlets. [www.itsmorrisseysworld.com](http://www.itsmorrisseysworld.com) / [www.nydolls.org](http://www.nydolls.org) / [www.pod.ie](http://www.pod.ie)**