

CD Review: Kevin Connolly's Ice Fishing



Hey kids, here's a fun fact about me - I'm an only child. I never had to share my toys, or my albums, or my family's affection with anyone else. And sure over the years I've often wondered how having a sibling would have changed the dynamics of my life, good or bad. Having been in a band for most of that lifetime, I really couldn't fathom having a brother or sister as a fellow musical comrade. Think of all the famed family acts that have notoriously gone south over the rock era. Don & Phil Everly didn't perform or even talk to each other for the better part of a decade. Ray & Dave Davies of The Kinks have been known to have show-stopping punch-ups literally on stage. And I shudder at the things that must have gone on in that Partridge Family bus.

But luckily for Boston-based singer songwriter Kevin Connolly, none of that melodrama applies to him and his brother Jim, who have completed a bi-coastal collaboration on Kevin's tenth album *Ice Fishing*. Thanks to modern technology, both men recorded their respective parts on opposite coasts, never being physically together in the same studio. But thanks to old-fashioned brotherly love, what unfolds over 14 tracks is a tangible monument to that intangible sixth-sense that only two guys who share a mom could possess. Kevin would record the basic tracks of vocals and guitars here in New England, while big brother Jim was fundamentally given cart-blanc to interpret bass and keyboard parts all the way in sunny Santa Barbara, California.

I've listened to *Ice Fishing* in its entirety several times now; There are a few truisms that are evident throughout. Primarily Kevin Connolly's seasoned and foreboding vocals drive the album every bit as much as a Stratocaster does Eric Clapton's most renowned work. Connolly's rich voice carries every emotion from pain to joy in such a way that elevates the lyrics from merely off the page, to directly into the heart of the listener. There's real experience and integrity coming from them road-worn vocal chords.

Connolly's roots rock / blues background is on full display for the album's opening track "Bus Station," not to mention a penchant for colorful songwriting. Although I could be wrong, one could argue that the inspiration for the characters in his station are autobiographically based: "Here comes Indiana Jones in his canvas pants, headlights flash like camouflage dance / Looking for fresh air and homemade granola, he's a fanny sackin, tree hugging man of devotion."

On "Here Comes Whitey," Connolly delivers the inevitable ode to one of the most notorious organized crime figures of the last 50 years, James 'Whitey' Bulger. "Here comes Jimmy with a butcher knife — someone's getting beaten within an inch of their life / Dont you act too cool , dont you talk too much. — Whatcha gonna do with a gun in your mouth."

Flipping the spectrum of tribute paying to its other end, Connolly delivers a soulful and touchingly heartfelt gift to his young daughter with the ballad "Blow Them Away." It takes a lot to get through to my cynical heart, but the following line actually set my lower lip a-quivering: "Your mother and me we see an innocent child... let the world be forewarned of your hurricane ways. You'll blow them away." Simply put, that is some great songwriting.

I would be remiss if I didn't underscore Jim Connolly's unique bass playing throughout *Ice Fishing*. Big brother's upright slides and wraps around Kevin's melody in a way that perks the listener's ear and makes the tracks anything but predictable. The symbiotic musical relationship the Connolly men have is nothing short of magical. And perhaps Kevin Connolly sums it up best in the liner notes of *Ice Fishing*: "I'm lucky to have him, and so is he..."