



Facing the music

Paddy Casey found success with three chords and the truth. Now he wants his fans to get up and dance, writes Tony Clayton-Lea

Three albums down the line and Paddy Casey is starting to figure out that life just might be a bowl of cherries after all. Following teenage years of what can safely be termed "misspent", Casey approached his 20s with a bunch of songs that formed the basis of *Amen (to That)*, one of the better debut albums of the early noughties from the avalanche of serious-headed young men and women weaned on a diet of singer-songwriter nights at Dublin venues Whelan's and the International Bar.

The album had a lightness of touch that surprised many and pleased even more - the songs were, by and large, flighty, clever and imbued with a serious melodic sensibility. And wasn't Casey just too cute for words, with his ringlet hair, his Hobbit height and Frodo face? The only way was up.

It was, however, *Living*, Casey's second album, that truly sent him on his way, selling almost 200,000 copies in Ireland alone, making him a bona-fide star in this country and placing him in a category of one.

The upside was that, after years of living on the hoof, with a young daughter (Saoirse, now 11) in tow, he was able to move from a small place in Dublin to a larger home in Kildare. Casey was a reluctant success story, however, never one to needlessly talk up his change of fortune or wallow in the superficiality that such success brings about as an automatic by-product.

Following three years of playing the rear end out of *Living*, Casey's new album - *Addicted to Company Part 1* - sees a rather more mature sound in operation, a sound deliberately sonically tweaked for success outside Ireland.

The success of *Living* put Casey in a position which allowed him to call a number of the shots, and as a result, he found himself last year holed up in Los Angeles for several months, recording *Addicted* with Tom Petty/ Primal Scream producer George Drakoulias and haggling over the mixing with Lar-

ry Hamby, the man who attuned millions of ears worldwide to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

It is, suggests *The Irish Times*, a long way from busking in Grafton Street and turning a musical trick. In a small, dark booth in a nice Southside Dublin hotel, Casey deliberates in his usual delayed-reaction fashion. It takes time to segue into it, but gradually you understand not to ask questions too rapidly in succession, otherwise the answer he gives to question 10 will actually be the answer to question seven. Let's put it this way - you wouldn't want him on your quiz team during the quick-buzzer round.

"I DON'T MISS it in the slightest," he says of his erstwhile busking days, "because it was a pain in the arse a lot of the time. It was fun, yes, but when it wasn't it was horrible. If I had to do it again I'd probably do what Damien Rice suggested, which was to go to a different country and busk or play where no one knows you. That way at least you can figure out if you have what it takes."

He's in reminiscing mode, perhaps buoyed up by the imminent release of *Addicted to Company Part 1* and the slew of live dates that he will undertake to promote it.

"I figured stuff would be easier," he remarks, putting into context his sign-

ing to major label Sony some years back, the record company he is still connected to.

"I reckoned being signed to a major record label would mean that gigs would be advertised, which meant people would come to them. Definitely, especially when you go abroad, if the label hadn't given their support, I probably would have been playing to myself. Putting singles out to radio - they're handy for that, too."

Did he think there would be a huge difference in his life, with signing to Sony and leaving behind certain elements of his past (that he clearly

doesn't want to talk about)?

"I thought things would carry on they way there were. The mad thing is that no one ever tells you what everyone's job is in the record company. Trying to figure out the different jobs that people do can be frustrating. For starters, everything slows down once you sign to a major label. You work at your pace for years. With your gigs, you go out and put the flyers up, you stand around on the street and talk people into coming to the show. It's a fairly instant reaction/response thing.

"Then all of a sudden, things take a lot more time. There are instances where you'd ask, 'well, why can't we just do this now?', and the response would be, 'well, you just can't do that because you have to do this first'. There were times when I didn't understand why I had to wait so long for things to happen, but you get used to it. I can see how some people would be annoyed. It happened to me with the first album, but I know what the story is now. I figured out that anything you seriously want, you have to fight for it. Basically, the record company will get what they can, and it's your job to get what you can. I certainly think that at the end of the day they're on your side, but you still have to stick to your guns. And yet I suppose if *Living* hadn't sold as well as it did, I might not have been on the top of their list."

What's it like not having to worry about money any more?

Casey laughs at this one, as if financial responsibilities are still very much on the agenda.

"The funny thing is that if you really want to make money, you have to sell a lot more albums than I've sold. Thankfully, it's no longer a week-to-week thing anymore, but it's certainly a month-to-month thing. I have to gig, and if I don't, I won't have the house for much longer. As long as people keep coming to the gigs, I'll keep playing them."

There's no fear of audience numbers drifting away, even if the new album

lacks the singularity of his debut and the sing-song appeal of its follow-up. Clearly, Casey, his record company and his management (Principle Management) have set their sights on the United States.

"There is definitely a mix that makes it sound good on US radio," he admits. "I don't like handing anything over to anyone, but I don't have a mixer's ears and so I just couldn't do it. If I'd done it, would have torn the ears off the listener."

FANS OF CASEY who yearn for the winning simplicity of just him and his guitar will also be disappointed - he's fed up with the voice-and-guitar combination, a mix he regards as monochrome. The new album, he remarks, has a lot more colour.

"Everyone tells me I sound better

with just a guitar, but I couldn't listen to the record if it was just me and a guitar. You gotta go by your instinct, and you have to gig them. I love having the band there on stage, and I really want people dancing at my gigs. I don't want them standing and staring at me.

"That's what it was like at the start, and it was great. Sometimes you miss that, but there are more people now, it's more craic. The thing of people staring at me and being so into it that they do nothing - it's just not for me."

◆ *Paddy Casey's new album, Addicted to Company Part 1, is out now. He plays Dublin's Olympia Theatre on Mon Oct 29 and Vicar Street on Tues Oct 30*



Paddy Casey:
'Everyone tells me I sound better with just a guitar, but I couldn't listen to the record if it was just me and a guitar'