

SYR : A SENTINEL OF CELTIC ROCK

John O'Regan brings us up to date with the music of SYR.



The rise in popularity of Celtic Rock in America has been an interesting experience to view. Initially it was a West Coast based phenomenon coming from the works of British roots outfits like Pentangle, ISB and Fairport Convention. Adding the expatriate element has seen the rise of East Coast acts like The Prodigals, and Celtic Cross.

Based in Columbia, South Carolina, SYR (pronounced sire) is that interesting phenomenon— a Celtic folk rock band formed around two siblings, Kyle (guitar/lead vocals) and Laurel MacCallum (percussion/vocals), with Kelly Vance (bass), Greg Vance (drums), Ben Campbell (guitar) and Worth Lewallen (fiddle).

I ask was the attraction to Celtic music originally from the family? Kyle MacCallum replies: “Oh absolutely! Celtic music has always been an important part of our family, and growing up

resonate with a modern audience. When I decided to start the band up again, I knew I wanted to merge traditional Celtic music with some of the harder music styles I had played, and over time I believe the band’s image has grown organically in that direction. Our first album for example has hints of what I was going for, but at the time I couldn’t quite figure out how to get there. It wasn’t until our second album *The Winter King* that I started to understand how to reach the sound that I was looking for, and that allowed me to create a ‘world’ so to speak that all of our songs take place in. Our albums are not concept albums with storylines, but they do tend to take place in that same world, which allows us to keep the themes consistent.”

The band’s material is a combined effort, Kyle explains: “the way it usually works for the music is that I write the songs and record demos of them with all of the different parts so everyone can hear an idea of how each one sounds overall. I’ll then send the tracks to each band member and they’ll learn the songs while adding their own styles and flair to the parts they play. As for the album artwork and other media, that’s a combined effort between my wife Gabi and me. She’s a fantastic artist who’s able to take an idea one of us has, and make it a reality. She also does our photography at shows, and we both do the video editing for our behind-the-scenes projects.”

Based in South Carolina, Syr’s audience covers ex-pats, locals and listening ears extending to all corners of America. What makes it all worthwhile according to Kyle MacCallum is, “People from all different walks of life coming together to enjoy Celtic culture and music, while sharing their cultures with us”. With their third studio album, *Sentinel*, completed and awaiting a public release date, SYR is ready to solidify their growing presence on the US Celtic Rock map.

Listen to sample tracks from SYR at www.syrmusic.com

“The idea was to write about Celtic history, legends, and stories finding themes that would resonate with a modern audience”

surrounded by it created a great love and respect for it within me. Every holiday, event, or family gathering, there was traditional Celtic music playing throughout the house, and even when I explored different genres and musical styles as a teen, I always came back to it. My mother Anne is a Celtic singer-songwriter, and we grew up in and around recording studios and watching her prepare for tours, so it’s been part of our experience as far back as I can remember. As for family members involved, my other sister Anna Claire was actually one of the original members of the band back in its pub days; my wife Gabi is our media manager; and my father Jess books for us and does a ton of administrative stuff, so it’s been very much a family affair in a lot of ways.”

Syr’s roots have developed from what Kyle MacCallum described as a “casual traditional band” after watching the *Lord of the Rings* movies; its initial formation played drinking songs at pubs and taverns. Then members moved on and Kyle retired the band only reforming with a different mindset. “It wasn’t long before I felt drawn to it again. I wanted to perform the songs I had been writing instead of covers, and I started to get serious about the band and its direction. The idea was to write about Celtic history, legends, and stories, and to find themes that would

