

Shirley Grimes

My biography.
By Shirley Grimes

My Booker, my Promotion Company, my Fans, Club Owners, Journalists. All of these people, at one time or another, have asked me again and again for an information leaflet, telling them not only about my most recent release, but also about me. I have tried to get people to write a short Biography for me. But that never really worked out. Now I give up. Officially. I am going to write it myself. It probably won't sound as bombastic as it would if I got a professional to write these lines. But who wants to be bombastic?

My name is Shirley Ann Grimes. I was born in a small town in the South-West of Ireland, called Killaloe. I grew up there in a small family, two sisters, my Mother and my Father. My extended Family was huge though. I was related to half the Village. I had lots of Uncles and Aunts, lots of Cousins to fight with.

I started singing so long ago that I can't even remember what age I was. I can remember always wanting to become a performer, a singer. The bathroom was my stage, my reflection in the mirror, my audience.

I borrowed my first guitar when I was 15. I went to a couple of classes to learn a few chords and learn how to hold the instrument. I practiced until the tips of my fingers were raw. I played and played until I could really play. Then I began singing to what I was playing. In the beginning I played just for people who came over to our house after an evening in the pub, then when summer came, I played in the garden on warm summer evenings, then in the park with friends who had just learned how to play, too. On one of those summer evenings, I met a traditional accordion player, Martin Ryan and his sister Brid. They played a lot of regular sessions in a lot of the pubs in our region. They asked me to come along and join them. I don't think they ever realized that they gave me the confidence that I needed to turn making music professionally from a dream into a reality. I played with them and many of the great traditional musicians for the following two years, right up until I boarded the boat that was to take me away from Ireland for over twenty years. I had planned to leave in the summer before my 19th birthday. I had only left the country once before and longed to see a little of the world. I had bought an inter-rail ticket with the money I had saved from the gigs. Shortly before I was due to leave Ireland, I met a Swiss girl who invited me to visit her in Bern. She told me that her ex-boyfriend was a bass player and maybe we could get together and make some music together. I accepted her invitation gratefully and arrived on her doorstep six months later.

On the night of my arrival, I went to see a great concert by a great band called Aventure Dupont in Berne's beautiful old town. I had never seen or heard anything like it. It was there I was introduced to Bänz Oester and Gilbert Paeffgen. Thanks to Gilbert's optimistic and pushy (in a good way) character, we started playing concerts together almost immediately. Six months after meeting we had already played the Gurten Festival in Berne. This is one of Switzerland's most loved, major open airs. We were being offered gigs left, right and centre. Things were going great. I received such

a warm welcome from the people of Switzerland. In 1993, I released my first C.D. 'songs of seas and ferries' with the Shirley Grimes Trio. It was a roaring success. I was 20 at the time and I wasn't really enjoying what was happening. I hadn't expected it. I wasn't ready for it. So I quit. I stopped playing music completely for over 2 years, publicly for 4. I opened a Dance Club with a few friends instead. My four years there were great. I learned so much about music, even though I didn't touch a guitar for almost two years. I realized that I didn't have a problem with music at all but with the music business. This, by the way, has not changed. In 1996 I started work on my second album. Bänz left the band, Wolfgang Zwiauer and Joe McHugh signed up with Gilbert and myself. I scraped together the money I needed to fly the musicians I had picked over to Ireland to record my second Album 'ode'. I released 'Ode' on my own label. 'Ode' was, unlike my first Album, a collection of songs I had written. It was my debut as a singer songwriter. I was very nervous at its release. I had no idea how the people would react to it. 'Ode' was given the title 'a small masterpiece' and I was given the title 'the Queen of Melancholy'. Ode was a musical success. The industry made sure it would not be more than that. As a musician, I was totally happy, as a songwriter too. I looked forward to my next Album. This came in 2001. It wasn't until this Album that I finally decided to invite a drummer and an electric guitarist into my life. My time with Gilbert had come to an end. I saw myself being drawn away from acoustic music and towards a rockier, poppy kind of sound. I had no experience in this area of music, so I went and got myself experience. This experience came in the form of Mat Callahan, a Californian producer who has remained a dear friend of mine to this day. Mat guided me on my path away from what I had done up until then. He gave me extreme confidence in my writing and supported all the changes I felt I had to make. In 2001, I released 'New Waters', and I was thrilled. We got great reviews and were invited to play a lot of concerts all over Switzerland.

New Waters marked the beginning of my journey away from folk music. I continued on that path with my next Album 'inside'. Inside was a turning point for me. It took me farther away from folk than I had ever been. It was on the strength of 'inside' that I was invited to play support for Bonnie Raitt and Van Morrison, for the first time. 'Inside' was probably the most important Album for me because it took me so far away from my roots that I began to miss them. After touring extensively with 'inside' for almost two years, I had a longing, like never before, to return to where it had all began. With me singing and me playing the guitar.

I had never performed with other bands up until 2003. I don't know why. But after inside I started to perform with several different bands and help in different kinds of productions. I started to tour with Simon Ho's 'Winterreise' and continue to perform duo shows with Simon to this day. I toured with Mich Gerber for nearly a year, did trio shows with Yvonne Moore and Mat Callahan, was soloist on several different choir projects, sang backing vocals on lots of different albums, performed with the 'Lovebugs'. For someone who had just had a second baby, I was quite busy. Performing and working with all these wonderful people was a huge inspiration to me and much of what can be heard on 'Sweet Rain', my fifth album, was inspired by many of these people. Despite the fact that 'Sweet Rain' was a success, despite the fact that we, as a band, were tight and secure, I knew that our time together was coming to an end. It was during the release Tour that I informed my band members that I no longer wanted to continue with them. We played the last shows and then went our separate ways. It took me the bones of a year to find out where I wanted to go from there. I had to sit in the dark for a while. I needed time to find out in which direction things wanted to evolve. All sounds very centered and spiritual, doesn't it? Well, it isn't. Sitting in the dark stinks but it is a necessary evil.....

In 2011 I released 'The long road home' which turned out to be the biggest success I have had since 'Songs of seas and Ferries'. I had found some old and some new musicians I wanted to work with. I travelled back to my Irish roots and doing so felt so right. I don't know why I had to leave them for so long.

Well, I do, but there is only so much you can admit to on the internet....

My 2011 release was toured extensively. So extensively that I ended up sick in bed for over two months after the Tour ended. It was a good but harrowing time. It was enlightening, in every sense of the word. It was emotionally great and emotionally terrible and even though it opened so many doors for me and it was a great success, I am glad that time is over. 'The long road home' helped me find out how far I can go before I have to say no. This is a lesson I had never learned before. It is a lesson that I am still learning today.

I got out of bed in the Summer of 2013 and slowly started work on my seventh Album. 'Lovesongs'. At this moment I am sitting behind the computer waiting for the mixes to arrive. I have to come up with a good running order. How do I feel? Uncertain. I always feel uncertain before a release. This is the last point in the production process where I could actually say no and bring everything to a halt. The temptation is big, it always is. But I won't. I will go ahead. Not because I have to but because the songs that are on the Album came to me. I don't know why, but they did. In them there is a story that wants to be told and I am the one who has to tell it.

I have lived here in Switzerland for the past 23 years. 23 years, my God!! I visit Ireland regularly and still harbor the dream that I will go back and make music there at one point in my life. I have two kids, one who is a teenager, one not yet. I have a partner that inspires me and challenges me. I have two eyes that I am trying to keep open and try to make honest music. I really do.

I have spent the past few minutes looking for a way to end this biography but then I realised it is not over. I don't have to end it. So, I won't.....