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Wave Movements

Friday 28 August, 9.15pm
eif.co.uk/wavemovements

Round-up

Saturday 29 August, 10.00pm
eif.co.uk/roundup



ALEXI MURDOCH

Thursday 27 August 9.30pm | The Hub

The performance lasts approximately
2 hours with one interval

EIF.CO.UK/MURDOCH

ALEXI MURDOCH

ALEXI MURDOCH VOICE, PIANO, GUITAR, HARMONIUM

JAMES MCALISTER PERCUSSION, ELECTRONICS

STEPHEN MOORE HORNS

RICHARD REED PARRY UPRIGHT BASS

Alexi Murdoch is that rare thing, a singer-songwriter known far better for his music than for his personality or image. His thoughtful, often heartbreakingly beautiful songs explore love, doubt and the quieter moments of life, all conveyed through Murdoch's distinctively rich, sometimes vulnerable low tenor, a voice perfectly suited to the tender imagery of his music. His songs have gained worldwide acclaim, but have never been marketed or promoted in the conventional sense.

And that's entirely intentional. Murdoch is less than comfortable with the idea of celebrity, seldom giving interviews for fear that too much focus on biography might detract from the value of his music. He has something of a mistrust of the conventional, big-business music industry, and he founded his own label Zero Summer to retain control of his recordings. Reclusive is probably going too far – despite his remote house on the west coast of Scotland, and his love of solitary night trips in an antique sailing boat. But he's an artist who puts his music, not himself, centre stage.

And that music has become known and adored by an enormous, devoted audience worldwide, partly through its use in countless TV series, films and even commercials. He's one of the most licensed artists in history, and his songs have been heard on the soundtracks to *Ugly Betty*, *Prison Break*, *The OC*, *House*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *One Tree Hill*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Away We Go* and many more.

That, too, is entirely intentional. Murdoch acknowledges the paradox of an independent artist getting his music out into the public consciousness through the commercial avenues he's elsewhere rejecting. He calls it the lesser of two evils: he could sign to a major record company and have label executives meddling in what he was creating, or he could keep personal control of his songs and allow film or TV producers to use them if they felt they were right. It's a compromise, he admits, but he also feels that film and TV are increasingly legitimate ways of discovering new music. (He's little idea of how his music ends up on screen, however: he seldom watches TV himself, calling it an 'advertising box' with programmes designed simply to keep viewers watching between commercials.)

Murdoch was first approached by major record labels as far back as the early 2000s, when a few early songs were championed by influential Los Angeles DJ Nic Harcourt. Murdoch had been born in London and raised near Athens, Greece (his father is Greek and his mother Scottish), and he spent much of his childhood and teenage years near Elgin, Scotland. He moved to the US in 1992 to study English and philosophy at Duke University, North Carolina, on the erroneous assumption that it was close to the state's Black Mountains where he'd enjoyed hiking (it isn't). He later moved to LA with a girlfriend, and in 2002 released his first EP, *Four Songs*, through independent record shops and website CD Baby (it remains the site's biggest-selling disc).

His first album, *Time Without Consequence*, followed in 2006, and its 11 introspective songs on the search for happiness, stumbling through darkness, and dealing with desolation took him two years to complete. He remembers it as an excruciating process, and a huge learning experience in terms of what works and what doesn't in the songwriting and recording process.

By contrast, Murdoch's second album, *Towards the Sun* (2011), was recorded in a single night. He wrote the songs across a winter in his Scottish coastal home while his girlfriend was away, although they'd long been percolating in his mind. When he recorded them – overnight in Vancouver, during a north American tour – he didn't intend them to form an album, only realising how well they worked together when he revisited the recordings six months later.

With just seven songs and lasting a mere 39 minutes, *Towards the Sun* is a bold statement of directness and concision. Yet it's entirely representative of Murdoch's sparse, pared-down musical thinking: no clutter, but a deep sense of emotion. He's admitted to wondering sometimes if the best song might just be a single word. There's an undeniable sense of spirituality to some of Murdoch's songs: he tends to observe what happens in the spaces between life's loud moments. It might be tempting to let Murdoch's poignant music simply wash over you, but in fact it actually requires – and repays – careful listening and interaction. Many of his songs feel like intimate conversations between performer and listener, both exploring Murdoch's own thoughts and feelings, and allowing his listeners the time and space to explore their own.

With his songs' fragile grace and mystery, as well as their emotional depth and honesty, Murdoch has often been compared with Nick Drake – a comparison he accepts, although he denies that Drake has been a direct influence, explaining that he only got to properly know the music of Nick Drake, Richard Thompson and John Martin relatively recently. It's strange to discover you're almost part of a tradition without knowing that that tradition even existed, he says.

Likewise, despite his Scottish roots and west coast cottage – which he now shares with bases in Montreal, New York and Reykjavik – Murdoch isn't completely comfortable with being described as Scottish – not unreasonable for a multinational musician with a nomadic upbringing. He's seldom performed in Scotland, but he accepts that Scottish music may well be unconsciously ingrained in his songs. Tonight's performance, for which Murdoch has put together a new band, represents something of a quiet homecoming.

© **David Kettle** is a freelance writer and editor

With support from **Mina Tindle** in a special acoustic and intimate performance from the Paris based singer who will be joined by special guests.