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Tracks Of My Years: Pierce Turner

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We first became aware of Pierce Turner when he just happened to cover one of our favourite songs on his 1987 debut album, *It's A Long Way Across...*



The song was The The's *Uncertain Smile*, and the young singer/songwriter just about made it his own. No mean feat.

Even better, Turner's own songs revealed a fully-formed artist, having spent his

early years taking over Greenwich Village as part of a duo with Larry Kirwan (who later formed Black 47). By the time Turner went solo, he already had a bucketful of songs that could make any man, woman or child with a soul break down and cry.

This is the guy, after all, who wrote *Wicklow Hills*, a staple of Christy Moore's live set for the last four or five hundred years. A major fan, you'll find a song on Moore's 2004 box set with the catchy title of *I Love The Way Pierce Turner Sings*. Tru dat.

Like any truly dedicated troubadour, Turner has been releasing a batch of new songs every two or



three years for over three decades now, along the way accumulating the sort of rabid live following that would make L. Ron Hubbard swoon.

With a fine feature-length documentary on Turner, *The Song For The Year*, having been put together by Greystones filmmaker Colin Murnane in 2008, it's surprising that next Friday at The Hot Spot marks the great man's debut in the town that

clearly loves him so well.

To mark the occasion, we asked Turner for his Top 10 when it comes to other people's songs, and being the artist that he is, he gave us more. Much more.

Beside the sacred sounds listed below, Turner would like it to be known that he would also sneak onto his desert island The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, Dylan's *Blonde On Blonde* and *Desolation Row*, Serge



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Gainsbourg's Je t'aime, The Shins' Phantom Limb, This Mortal Coil, Leonard Cohen's first album, The Beatles' Sgt Pepper, The Byrds' Eight Miles High, lots of Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music, Otis Redding's Otis Blue, Dusty Springfield's Goin' Back, Joni Mitchell's Big Yellow Taxi, Tir na nOg's Two White Horses, James Blakes's Wilhelm Scream and The Rolling Stones' Between The Buttons.

We're gonna need a bigger boat...



Van Morrison Astral Weeks

I owned just 12 albums when I lived in Dublin as a teenager, when I shared a Rathmines bedsitter with Larry Kirwan in Belgrave Square. This album put a taste in my mouth, a taste of gin and outer space, of smoky jazz rooms, and enviable originality.

Whatever he was doing, I would have to reach beyond the showband I was in, to reach for this.



Nimrod from Elgar's Enigma Variations

It stirs almost every human pure emotion – life, death, patriotism, loss, sadness, decency, God, rites of passage, communion, confirmation, and eternity.

It's one of those pieces of music that makes you want to be part of something that you can never quite reach.



tSiol (Sean O Riada)

Recorded by Michael Connolly

Sean O Riada Ag Chríost an tSiol

Our greatest composer since O'Carolan. This kind of haunting Irish melody lifts my heart and reassures me that music is an art form, not a popularity contest.



The Bothy Band Death of Queen Jane

Those who know my music, will know that I used this melody on a song called I Set You Up To Shake. This version is astonishing; recorded live in Paris, the voice is so beautiful. This track makes me shiver...

I was obsessed with it for years, and while touring for my first album I sang it to myself in the back of the bus so often, a personal lyric grew into it.



Cór Chúil Aodha Agus Peadar Ó Riada

My friend Una Johnston lived next door to me in Manhattan with Phelim O’Lunney, and she gave me a well-worn cassette of these guys around 1986. It was my sonic bible for several years, and I still have it. The sound of plain men singing their hearts out is incredible. The melodies and the way Peader plays chords, pulls the magic into another dimension.

You can find out more about Pierce Turner’s Hot Spot gig on Friday, February 23rd [here](#), and about the man and his music right [here](#).

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Frank Phelan says:

February 21, 2018 at 9:34 am

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The depth of Pierce Turner’s musical intellect is surpassed only by his musical genius. This article is a great insight into all of that. Thank you.

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