

Rick Shea & the Losin' End are Anaheim-bound

Musician interview / concert preview

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This post was contributed by a community member.

Rick Shea knows how much a broken heart hurts. But the source of his pain is not a woman, it's his beloved city of San Bernardino.



The 64-year-old Americana singer-songwriter was born in Annapolis, Maryland to a military family but moved to San Bernardino at age 11. Although he now lives with his own family in Covina, his roots run deep in the Inland Empire community that he says "has been in the news for all the wrong reasons." Shea shares his pathos with us on his latest album's title-track, "The Town Where I Live," as he laments: "The town where I live in is ragged and old/The daytimes are weary and the night brings you down/You could waste your whole life in this ragged old town."

San Bernardino has indeed struggled over the years with crime, unemployment and even bankruptcy back in 2012. Nothing can compare, however, to the horror unleashed by terrorism on Dec. 2, 2015. The mass shooting that day killed 14 people, seriously wounded 22 others and left the community reeling and searching for answers where there were none.

"That attack was just devastating in all the ways that you can possibly imagine," recalled Shea with a heavy sigh during a recent phone interview. "I consider San Bernardino my hometown and feel a strong attachment to it still. My wife has family there and my dad and younger brother are buried there. I spent my high school years in that town so I do hold it dear to my heart." (Shea earlier penned a bittersweet love letter to his hometown with the title-track from the 2013 release, "Sweet Bernardine.")

Shea began his musical career playing open mics, local coffeehouses and honky-tonks throughout Southern California in the 1970s. Influenced by classic country music greats Merle Haggard, Marty Robbins, Hank Williams—and later Emmylou Harris and the Flying Burrito Brothers—Shea was drawn to character-driven story songs with vivid imagery that gives voice to the troubled, lost and forgotten among us.

The surrounding landscape becomes a focal point in many of Shea's songs, where heat, dust, wind, vacant lots, boarded-up buildings and torn-up highways create their sense of time and place. Listeners can almost feel what the narrative's characters are experiencing in evocative, detail-rich numbers like "Walkin' to Jerusalem," a folk lament inspired by the death of Dave Alvin's father. Another fine example is the auto-biographical "John Shea from Kenmore," which tells the story of his Rick's great-grandfather during the Civil War.

"I do think about location a lot and period of time," Shea affirmed, "and got pretty hooked on narrative songwriting after listening to Marty Robbins and Lefty Frizzell, and then on to Merle Haggard and Bob Dylan. Whether it's folk, country or the blues, the great ones can spin a yarn like nobody else and that's what's intrigued me the most about being a singer-songwriter."

Musically, Shea blends elements of Americana, country, folk, blues and Tex-Mex into a mix of acoustic and electric soundscapes. He's toured as part of Dave Alvin's Guilty Ones band, recorded as a duo with fiddler Brantley Kearns and country singer Patty Booker, released 10 solo albums, and remains a highly-regarded studio multi-instrumentalist (acoustic, electric, nylon-stringed, lap and pedal steel guitars plus the mandolin.)

Shea is expertly backed on "The Town Where I Live" by the Losin' End, his longtime supporting cast featuring bassist Dave Hall, drummer Steve Mugalian and multi-instrumentalist Stephen Patt. The seamless interplay and emotional connection between all four players shines through on the 10-song collection.

"I did feel a special `band' vibe while we were making the record," said Shea. "I've played with these guys for years and just feel really solid when we're making music together. We did add some back-up female vocals but I don't need anyone else to fill out the sound, really."

Rick Shea & the Losin' End do have something special together. With "The Town Where I Live" album in particular, they've created sadly beautiful—and at times haunting—music that pulls you in and stays with you for a quite a spell.

How many bands can you say that about?