

Mad Folk News

James Keelaghan: Songs That Endure

♪ Few contemporary songwriters have earned the respect and affection that James Keelaghan commands within the folk world. For four decades, Keelaghan has been quietly crafting songs that stay with listeners long after the final chord fades—songs rooted in history, conscience, and a deep empathy for ordinary lives. Dave Marsh, the eminent Rolling Stone critic, simply described Keelaghan as “Canada’s finest songwriter.”

Throughout a career that now spans almost four decades, the Juno and Canadian Folk Music Award winner has created a repertoire of incalculable importance – a unique body of work, either inspired by or drawn from the folk tradition. Originals from the Keelaghan

cannon must surely enter the domain of traditional folklore. Most notably, Small Rebellions (highlighting the 1931 slaughter of peaceful striking miners in Bienfait, SK); Hillcrest Mine (a prelude to the worst coal mining disaster in Canadian history); Kiri’s Piano (a triumph over adversity amidst the shameful, racist treatment of Japanese-Canadians during WW II); Cold Missouri Waters (a harrowing portrait of the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire in the mountains of Montana).

Keelaghan connects past and present with a clear moral eye,

reminding us that the struggles of earlier generations echo into our own time. Moreover, there is warmth and wit in his writing, and often a subtle humor that keeps even the heaviest material grounded and human.

James Keelaghan grew up in a bungalow in northwest Calgary, Alberta, with six siblings, an Irish father, and an English mum. From his father, Jim, James developed a love of history. The family record collection provided further inspiration. Traditional folk LPs by the likes of The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Séan Ó Riada, and Harry Belafonte caught young Keelaghan’s ear. He still cites Belafonte At Carnegie Hall as a recording that changed his life at age six!

Since 2011, he has been the Artistic Director of the Summerfolk Music and Crafts Festival in Owen Sound, Ontario. and since 2018 Artistic Director at the Stewart Park Festival in Perth, Ontario, where he now lives.

Keelaghan’s influence extends far beyond his own recordings. He is a respected mentor, collaborator, and advocate for folk music, and his songs are widely covered by other artists. Multiple awards—including JUNOs, Canadian Folk Music Awards, and international songwriting honors—attest to the en-

during power of his work.

As a performer, Keelaghan is engaging, generous, and deeply present. His concerts are marked by thoughtful introductions, well timed stories, and a genuine connection with the audience.

Please don’t pass up this rare opportunity to hear one of folk music’s greatest and most beloved talents.

James Keelaghan
Friday, March 6, 2026
7pm (doors at 6pm)
North Street Cabaret
610 North Street, Madison
Tickets: \$27 adv / \$32 d.o.s.

Non-perishable donations of food will be collected for local food banks.





• See madfolk.org or our facebook page for latest show postings



Save the Date - Details TBA

- March 6th James Keelaghan - North Street Cabaret - @7pm - \$27 adv / \$32 day of show
- April 18th - Anne Hills
- May 7th Ganet Rogers - last U.S. tour - North Street Cabaret - @7pm
\$30 adv / \$33 day of show



Don't forget!
Non-perishable donations of food are collected for local food banks at all Mad Folk shows!

On the Air

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Simply Folk on Wisconsin Public Radio w/ Síle Shigley, Jeff Durkey & Steve Gotcher



Sun 5:00-9:00pm

Concerts recorded in Wisconsin, music and dance of people the world over. For playlists, calendars, station listings, and more, visit www.wpr.org/simplyfolk



WORT 89.9 FM community radio visit <https://wortfm.org> for more info!

- Sun 3pm - 5pm - On the Horizon (international, world, ethnic music) w/ Ford Blackwell, Paul Novak, Gloria Hays & Helena White
- Mon 9am to noon - Global Revolutions (folk music from the world over) w/ Dan Talmo & Martin Alvarado & Helena White
- Tue 9am to noon - Green Morning Radio (indie, folk, rock, alt, country, acoustic blues & singer-songwriters) w/ Brian Hirsh - Except Last Tuesday of the month - One Fine Morning w/ P.C. Allen
- Wed 9am to noon - Back to the Country (country music on a theme) w/ Steven & Marianne, Nate Gibson, Art Stevenson & Bill Malone
- Thur 9am to noon - Hejira (folk and international) w/ Jeff Spitzer-Resnick
- Fri - Mud Acres (bluegrass and acoustic) w/ Chris Powers



WVMO The Voice of Monona - Promoting the best in Good Music - Roots Music - Americana Music

Plus Community Members Hosted Shows

Streaming Live and on your mobile device through tunein radio

Stuart Stotts

Weekly new song Facebook Live event. Song Premiere on Tuesday (SPOT) at 11AM facebook.com/stuart.stotts

Misc

Sea Shanty Sing @Roxy's Restobar -- 208 W. Main St, Stoughton

No experience necessary. Songbooks provided and songs taught. 7pm every second Tuesday.

Open Mic @Cargo Coffee -- 750 E. Washington Ave.

Brave the stage or enjoy the show every first and third Sunday, 5-7pm. Sign-up starts at 4:30pm

Open Mic @Java Cat -- 4221 Lien Rd.

Check out local talent at the cafe's new location on the last two Sundays of each month.

Old Time Jam

Monthly - 3rd Saturday of every month, 2 to 5pm

Location: Brix Cider, Mt Horeb

Coodinator: Greg Jones, 7771jones@gmail.com

Al Wilson, adwilson@pediatrics.wisc.edu

Madison Area Ukulele Initiative -- Singalongs

3rd Sunday 11am - 1:30pm

- for location visit www.MAUImadison.com

Considered one of Canada's great singer songwriters, Keelaghan "displays a genius for finding his way deep inside big stories, building them outward from palpably intimate moments." ~ *The Boston Globe*



**Madison Folk Music
Society PRESENTS**

James Keelaghan

Friday, March 6, 2026

7:00 pm

THE NORTH STREET CABARET, 610 North St, Madison WI

Tickets \$27 advance, \$32 day of show

Available at: <https://buytickets.at/madisonfolkmusicsociety/1960134>

Non-perishable donations of food will be collected for local food banks.



WILD AND CLEAR AND BLUE - I'M WITH HER
2025 - ROUNDER RECORDS



Review by Kiki Schueler

The phrase I'm With Her either conjures memories of Hillary Clinton's failed 2016 presidential bid, or, if you're lucky, the moniker chosen by the trio of Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan when they began touring together in 2015. The three had know each other for years (Jarosz was only nine when she met Watkins at a bluegrass festival), but didn't begin collaborating until they were asked to play together at the 2014 Telluride Bluegrass Festival. Their sophomore release 2025's Wild and Clear and Blue comes seven years after their debut See You Around, and they have effortlessly recaptured the charm of that first release. Much is made about the magic of "blood harmonies," the uniquely rich sound created by biologically related individuals, but I'm With Her makes a strong case for adopted blood being just as powerful. The theme of family, with all its various 'hoods, runs deep on Wild; sisters, daughters and mothers all get their due. At 43 (O'Donovan) and 44 (Watkins), the two are a decade older than Jarosz who is 34. They are simultaneously peers and big sisters.

The writing for the album was one of complete cooperation, and the trio stresses how if everyone wasn't happy with a song, then no one was happy. Watkins says of the process, "we all are very willing to stay at the table until things come together, un-

til we're all happy." It shows. Every song here feels balanced, the talents of all three multi-instrumentalists expressed. O'Donovan plays guitar and piano, Jarosz banjo, guitar and mandolin, with Watkins on fiddle, cello and organ. Producer Josh Kaufman (Bonny Light Horseman) plays almost everything else you hear from bass to harmonium, while JT Bates provides drums and percussion. It all comes together on opening track "Ancient Light," whose video looks like the coolest girls' weekend ever, and which announces its intentions in the opening line. "Better get out of the way," they sing, "gonna figure out what I wanna say, I've been a long time coming." It's forward looking even while checking over its shoulder, "Thinking of who came before, I hear them knock on the door. They've been a long time coming." Watkins' fiddle introduces the title track and buoys it throughout. Again they acknowledge generations of influences, "Heard you singing about paradise. 'What's that?' I asked and my mama said 'That was everywhere when I was a kid.'"

The musically spare (guitar and cello at the forefront) but emotionally deep "Only Daughter" delves into both motherhood and childhood, and what it means to be in both of those positions. Mother Earth also figures in as the song brims with images from nature: moon, stars, water and purple martins. The similarly solemn "Sisters of the Night Watch" highlights their gorgeous harmonies in a slow-building, dreamlike chorus. On "Different Rocks, Different Hills," which percolates with banjo and fiddle, they look at how everyone's Sisyphean task is different, and the what and the how of it isn't always obvious. "Find My Way to You" pairs Watkins' fiddle

with Jarosz's mandolin for a gorgeous, traditional sounding bluegrass stomp. Meanwhile, final track "Rhododendron" manages to make the flower's unwieldy name into an unlikely, meditative chorus.

Supergroup is a term that is arguably overused, but in this case it is justifiable. Despite the time between releases, I'm With Her is quite obviously a cohesive group and their collaboration is indisputably super.

Mad Folk News is published monthly by the Madison Folk Music Society, a non-profit, volunteer-led society dedicated to fostering folk music in the Madison area.

Contact us at madfolk@charter.net. Learn about concerts, membership, scholarships, and volunteer opportunities at www.madfolk.org.

www.facebook.com/pages/Madison-Folk-Music-Society/34497984835

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<https://www.facebook.com/madisonfolkmusicsociety>

Venues

muso
2040 Winnebago Street
Madison WI
musomadison.com

muso

- Wednesdays, 5-7 pm Madison Song Circle
(From Rise Up Singing and Rise Again, folk instruments welcome)
- 1st and 3rd Sundays at noon: Sjungar Folket -Singing People (a capella group)
- 1st and 3rd Sundays, 5-7 pm Muso Slow Irish Sessions
- 2nd and 4th Saturdays, 2-4 pm Blue Grass Jam with Davey Harrison



Wil-Mar Center
504 S. Brearly St.
wildhoginthewoods.org
608-233-5687

Wild Hog in the Woods

- Friday, Feb. 6th, 7:30pm KG & The Ranger Trio
- Friday, Feb. 13th, 7:30pm Polkalamity
- Saturday, Feb. 20th, 7:30pm Chris Powers
- Friday, Feb. 21st, 2:00pm Hootenanny
- Friday, Feb. 27th, 7:30pm Mike McDougal

NORTH STREET CABARET

610 North St
Madison, WI
northstreetcabaret.com

- Sun, Feb 28th - Sugar Maple Presents: Shoman and Coole - @7pm
- Fri, Mar 6th - James Keelaghan - @7pm
- Sat, Mar 7th - Louis Michot - @8pm

The Malt House
2609 E. Washington Ave
Madison, WI
malthousetavern.com

The Malt House

- 1st Monday - Grandpa's Elixir
- 2nd Monday - The Kissers
- 3rd Monday - Material boys
- 4th Monday - Barley Brothers
- 1st Tuesday - Cajun Strangers
- 2nd Tuesday- Birds, Birds, Birds
- 3rd Tuesday - Onadara
- 4th Tuesday - Dollar Bill and The Bucks
- 1st Wednesday - The North Westerners
- 3rd Wednesday - Don't spook the horse

The Bur Oak
2262 Winnebago Street
Madison, WI
theburoakmadison.com

The Bur Oak

- Thu, Feb. 12th - Dan Navarrow w/ Franko - @8pm

The Atwood Music Hall
1925 Winnebago Street
Madison, WI
theatwoodmusichall.com

The Atwood Music Hall

- Fri, Feb. 13th - The Kingston Trio - @7pm
- Sat, Feb. 14th - Chickenwire Empire & Askansauce - @8pm
- Wed, Feb. 18th - Glen Phillips (Toad the Wet Sprocket) - @8pm
- Fri, Feb. 20th - Singer Songwriter Folk Release Party Old Oaks, Sam Ness, Dan Perry - @7:30pm
- Sun, Feb. 22nd - Solas - @7:30pm
- Sat, Feb. 28th - Eberhart / Gorka / Kaplansky and Larkin - @8pm

The Harmony Bar
2201 Atwood Ave
Madison, WI
harmonybarandgrill.com

The Harmony Bar

- Sun, Feb 1st - Gaines and Wagoner - @4pm
- Wed, Feb 11th -Annie and the Oakies - @6:30pm
- Sun, Feb 15th -O'Darby Irish Oub Band - @5pm

Stoughton Opera House
9736 Main Street
Stoughton, WI
stoughtonoperahouse.com

Stoughton Opera House

- Wed, Feb 21st - Vienna Teng - @7:30pm - \$35
- Wed, Feb 28th -The Hot Club of Cowtown - @7:30pm - \$35

"WHEN IS MY RENEWAL DUE?"

(Hint: It is NOT the date on the mailing label!)

The date shown on the mailing label is NOT your membership expiration date! There has been some confusion lately, and we apologize for that.

The date is just the date the labels were printed, as new cost-saving postal procedures do not allow us to include expiration dates there anymore.

When it is time to renew, we will send you a personal notice by mail or email.

At that point you will be able to either mail a check or renew online at www.madfolk.org.

If you have questions about your membership in the meantime, send email to info@madfolk.org. Thanks for your membership and support of Mad Folk!

Way #1 – online

Visit www.madfolk.org and click on "Join MFMS"

Way #2 – unplugged

Complete, clip, and mail this form

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Madison-Folk-Music-Society/34497984835>

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Family \$20 _____

Friend \$25 _____

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Life \$500 _____

Scholarship fund donation (optional) \$ _____

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Send your check, payable to MFMS to: Mad Folk c/o

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