

Left to right: Carlos wears Exile Vintage shirt. Deegan wears Driew Garments Issey Miyake sweater. Curley wears Exile Vintage sweater and shirt. Grian wears Exile Vintage Fox shirt. Tom wears Slow Turtle Shop jacket.

Fontaines D.C.

LET'S NOT SAY A WORD IF IT ISN'T TRUE

*Written by Gregg LaGambina
Photographed by Elliot Muscat and Jacob Walker
Styled by Meg Leila Summers*

Left to right: Deegan wears DRIEW GARMENTS ISSEY MIYAKE sweater and boots and EXILE VINTAGE pants. Curley wears EXILE VINTAGE sweater and shirt and SLOW TURTLE SHOP pants. Grian wears EXILE VINTAGE FOX shirt and VINTAGE OUTLAW pants. Tom wears SLOW TURTLE SHOP jacket and pants and DR. MARTENS boots. Carlos wears EXILE VINTAGE shirt and SLOW TURTLE SHOP pants.



Left to right: Deegan wears DRIEW GARMENTS ISSEY MIYAKE suit. Curley wears his own suit and VINTAGE OUTLAW sweater. Tom wears THE WANDERING WIT jacket, VINTAGE OUTLAW shirt, and DR. MARTENS boots. Carlos wears EXILE VINTAGE sweater, DRIEW GARMENTS LEVI'S pants, and DR. MARTENS shoes. Grian wears VINTAGE OUTLAW RALPH LAUREN shirt and ADIDAS vest, SLOW TURTLE SHOP pants, and CONVERSE shoes.

Location: Phoenix Concert Theatre



PHOTOGRAPHERS: ELLIOT MUSCAT AND JACOB WALKER; STYLIST: MEG LEILA SUMMERS. LOCATION: PHOENIX CONCERT THEATRE.

COLED UP IN A HOTEL IN MONTREAL, GRIAN Chatten of the Irish five-piece, Fontaines D.C., is resting his voice, fending off a spat of laryngitis, and considering an afternoon walk to visit the just-opened exhibition showcasing the work and ephemera of contemporary artist, Nick Cave. At some point, in preparation for the next night's gig, he'll also, "take steroid injections into my ass, like a mule."

Just days prior, his band's third full-length record, *Skinty Fia*, was released not just to the usual acclaim that has greeted his band from the get-go, but also to an eager public that propelled the quintet's album to number one in both Ireland and England, their newly adopted home. In any other decade, this wouldn't be such a surprising triumph for a "guitar band," as they are apparently called now, instead of what they are: the most exciting rock band to come along since the early aughts. If you've been wandering in the wilderness since Interpol's debut, not feeling the nostalgic pull to revisit Arcade Fire, or you've been in search of someone, anyone, to reclaim the mantle and become your new "favorite band," Fontaines D.C. is up to the task.

"The number one chart thing," begins Grian, pausing to consider the implication that his group might be poised to take over America next, "I don't wanna sound like a dick, but it didn't really touch me. I don't want to put pressure on myself. Honestly, I just wanna write my tunes. That's what happened the night that it was announced it was number one. I was flying on my own from New York to Columbus [Ohio] to meet the lads to play a gig. I wrote all the lyrics to a new tune, and *that's* my response. That's how I come to terms with it. I'm a writer. I'm not someone who sits around and celebrates."

And Grian is a writer, in the traditional sense. It's no secret the Irish adore language. The two of us even spend a bit of time

discussing the 1965 campus novel, *Stoner*, by John Williams, partly an inspiration for the stripped-down song "The Couple Across the Way," featuring Grian narrating his observations over a solo accordion with a novelist's gift for finding beauty in the mundane.

The album opener, "In ár gCroíthe go deo"—a phrase meaning "in our hearts forever"—is an ode to an Irish woman whose family wanted the words on her gravestone, only to be told by the Church of England that a translation must be added, so as not to be considered a political provocation. It's a story from ancient history that occurred in 2018. The family has since won their case and also heard the song Grian had written about the ordeal and thanked him. "I feel good when I feel like I'm fighting for something," Grian says. "All of us in the band were genuinely shocked and outraged and deeply upset about it. That song doesn't feel written—it just felt like it happened."

The idea of music as an agent of change is also something that seems uniquely important to Irish musicians, from The Pogues melding punk with trad Irish music; to early U2's propensity to pepper arenas with pronouncements between songs about whatever was bedeviling Bono at the time; and Sinéad O'Connor's banishment from *Saturday Night Live* for tearing a picture of Pope John Paul II in half. An incident which still baffles Fontaines guitarist Carlos O'Connell. "When she tore that picture, there was silence. No one clapped," recalls Carlos. "The next week, Joe Pesci opens the show saying if he was her husband, he would have given her a big slap in the face, and everyone in the audience started clapping. It's crazy to think that, in America, they clapped for him and not for her for making such a brave and necessary statement. I think if she did that now, it probably wouldn't have as much impact because that figure she's ripping up doesn't have as much importance anymore. Part of the reason is probably because of her

doing that. That's power."

The fight in Fontaines is what makes them so compelling on first listen. This is a band, mind you, that opened their debut record by claiming "Dublin in the rain is mine/A pregnant city with a Catholic mind...my childhood was small/But I'm gonna be big." And big they have become. There is no number higher than one when it comes to album charts, but if you ask drummer Tom Coll, he prefers being the underdog. He, too, is disinterested in the specifics of success and how it's measured, preferring the struggle to prove himself. "I really enjoy trying to win over crowds," Tom says. "That's my favorite thing to do. We played a show in Zürich. Swiss people are notoriously reserved. They'll stand there and nod their heads with their arms folded. Those gigs are my favorite, when you really have to work. Playing the new tunes has been a little like that."

Anyone who has latched onto this five-piece along the way and became a devotee from either the propulsive first swing of 2019's debut *Dogrel* or its more melancholic follow-up, *A Hero's Death*, will have to do some work to catch up with this band who has again switched up the formula just enough to simultaneously be familiar and a giant leap forward in sophistication, songwriting, and scope. If "In ár gCroíthe go deo" pulls you in gently with its repeated choral mantra, the album's closer "Nabokov" soars steeply and rapidly to a conclusion that sounds more like the band is leaping eagerly into whatever comes next, rather than coming to a full stop. Three equally, yet differently fantastic albums in as many years signifies a band not at the height of their powers, but still ascending. To them, *Skinty Fia* is done, has been done, as they sat on it to wait out the worst of the pandemic to tour behind it. And as much as they are elated to be touring the States, work on the next one has already begun. "I can't wait to

do the next thing," says Tom. "We finished this record over a year ago, which is the weirdest fucking feeling ever. The mentality we have, which Grian has talked about, is that once you start releasing singles, those songs aren't yours anymore. The ownership is gone. When we don't have something to be excited about that's just ours, that's when we want to start writing again. You need something to hold back from people that nobody knows about. That's the way we work. We always need some sort of secret up our sleeves to be buzzing about."

Even Grian's voice, strained from touring Europe, hasn't set them back. It's only made him more determined to give everything he has to anyone who makes it out to see them. He's taken a bout with laryngitis and integrated it into their set, using it as a tool to improve on the sentiment of "Nabokov" with the added sincerity of his physical struggle to even get the words out. "That song has become my favorite to play live at the moment," Grian explains. "Especially if it's at the end of the set, and I'm tired, or I've had problems with my voice. We come into that song, and I get to look at the crowd and say, 'I'll be your dog in the corner/I'll be your dog of submission' or 'I did you a favor/I bled myself dry,' and it becomes a moment of pure sincerity, of real expression that I wait for in the whole set. It's where I get to finally tell the crowd that I'm pissed off, but that I'm doing this for them."

"We understand the language that we started inventing with *Dogrel* a lot better now than when we began," adds Carlos. "We understand the nuances within it. I'm proud of this album and I'm excited to see what the world thinks of it. I'm also excited to just continue to do it, to write more. It's an amazing period right now. We're three albums in, and we're established. There's none of that anxiety that if we take a wrong step, we're gonna fall. That's a very good place to be."