



# Back on patrol



SNOWED UNDER: moderately successful until 2005, Snow Patrol became a phenomenon in 2006 with the album *Eyes Open* and the single, *Chasing Cars*.

Despite their global success, Snow Patrol have returned to their Irish roots with an acoustic tour and an *Other Voices* recording, says **Ed Power**

**C**HERYL Cole was terrified. In 24 hours, she was due to give one of the most demanding performances of her career, a Comic Relief duet with anthemic stadium rockers, Snow Patrol. She'd never sung with a rock band before, and worried whether she could pull it off.

"With X Factor singers, you never know how great a vocalist they'll be," says Snow Patrol's Jonny Quinn of their pre-Christmas collaboration with the Girls Aloud glamazon.

"We were asked by the record company to do it, and, to be honest, we were sceptical."

As was Cole, it turns out. "She was really nervous," says Quinn.

"At one point, she was going to pull out. We thought this was going to be too much pressure for her. In fact, she came to rehearsals and we did a couple of run-throughs. And it was fantastic. Everyone was sur-

prised at how well she did."

Just a few years ago, the idea of Snow Patrol duetting with a number one-selling pop star would have struck many as preposterous — not least, the band themselves. Though they've shifted some 20m records in their career, their slog to the top has been slow and difficult. In fact, in their 15-year history, Snow Patrol have spent almost as long struggling for recognition as they have bending adoring arenas to their well. In 2003, the band were so desperate to expand their then meagre fanbase, they actually stumped up the entry fee for the Mercury Music Prize out of their own pockets, when their label decided to take a pass (the two sides would later part company).

Their big break arrived soon afterwards. Picked up by Universal Records, the group decided to have one more shot at success. If things didn't pan out, chances are they'd

call it quits. With an extra guitarist in the line-up, and a new, Coldplayesque emphasis on the epic and the earnest in their songs, their last rattle of the dice worked better than they could possibly have dreamed. On the back of heavy airplay, their Chris Martin-ish single, Run, went top ten in Ireland and the UK — and stayed there for what felt like about six months. Two years later, they had a massive US hit with Chasing Cars, and, suddenly, Ireland had its biggest rock band since The Cranberries.

Still, their reign at the top hasn't been without interruption. Late in 2008, Snow Patrol released their most experimental

record since graduating as proper rock stars. Though it contained its share of punter-friendly hits, A Hundred Million Suns was, in places, strikingly avant-grade. Not surprisingly, sales were down significantly compared to its predecessors, though still a platinum hit many times over. Were the band stung by this?

"Well, I still think we sold enough to be happy," says Quinn. "We don't have a goal of world domination. We try to improve on the last album we've made. That's the main thing for us. If the record company can manage to sell enough so that we can go and do it again and not be held back, well, that's fine. We were

kind of shocked to be able to sell a million albums in the first place."

Did their label see things in the same, benign light? "Actually, we're very lucky. The people we have at our label, they get behind us all the way. They're not too stuffy, in terms of 'you can or can't release this' or what. We've always been able to decide ourselves. They don't interfere, or request that we write this or that type of song," he says.

Not long after A Hundred Million Suns hit stores, Snow Patrol, and their label, agreed it might be wise to put out a 'best of'. Rather than touring it in the conventional manner, however,

the band decided on a different approach: an acoustic trek around Ireland and the UK, for which they would present drastically reworked versions of their songbook. How did this unexpected turn go down with fans?

"Well, there are always a few people who, even if you put a sign up

outside the venue announcing that this isn't a run-of-the-mill show, will go in expecting something else," says Quinn. "In general, though, the idea was very well received. We did it for a gig at the Royal Albert Hall, last year, and everybody was saying it was so good we should do it again. As it happens, we agreed."

All five members of Snow Patrol

are from Greater Belfast, though the line-up only came together when they went to study at Dundee University. In the UK, they are predictably hailed as an outstanding example of 'British' musical achievement. In fact, their ties to Ireland are deep-rooted. Their last two records were partly recorded here: A Hundred Million Suns in Galway, and at Grouse Lodge Studio, in Westmeath; Eyes Open in Dingle, Co Kerry.

Therefore, it is appropriate that it was to Dingle that Snow Patrol returned, at the end of 2009, for an acoustic performance on RTE's long-running music showcase, Other Voices, which starts its latest season tomorrow night. As it happens, Snow Patrol have been planning on playing the event for years. Alas, their whirlwind schedule kept getting in the way.

"We have very warm memories of Dingle," says Quinn. "We actually debuted some of the songs from Eyes Open in the local nightclub, The Hillgrove. Chasing Cars was played there for the first time, albeit in a radically different form to what eventually ended up on record. I think footage is out there on YouTube, somewhere."

"It's a mystical place. I climbed Mount Brandon quite a bit. I had a real sense of it being like something from Lord Of The Rings. There is a lot that is special about that part of the world. There's a fantastic traditional music scene, as well, obviously. We rented a house and demoed most of the album there. It was great to get away to the countryside and write without any interruptions," he says.

Quinn loved Dingle so much he bought a house in the town. "Until I met my wife, I lived in Dingle for two and a half years. Up to that point, I'd lived in cities all my life. I'd been to Dingle on holidays and I loved it. So, I decided to go and do something quite different. Obviously, I wasn't there all the time. We'd be away on tour. After all the bustle of life on the road, it made for a fantastic contrast," he says.

While there, he became a devotee of Other Voices, which is filmed in the cosy environs of St James's church. "One year, I went to see Rufus and Martha Wainwright playing together. Elbow were there, too, I think. It was amazing. It's such a fantastic concept — all these amazing acts in a 120-seat venue. The people who book it should be in A&R — they seem to cotton onto all these stars before they become huge. I think Duffy gave one of her first performances there," he says.

If he was such a fan of Dingle, why leave? "I got married and there wasn't enough for my wife to do there while we were on tour. I suppose, she could have gone fishing or knitted jumpers or made pottery. But I'm not sure how pleased she'd be if I told her that."



"SHE [CHERYL COLE] WAS REALLY NERVOUS. AT ONE POINT SHE WAS GOING TO PULL OUT. WE THOUGHT THIS WAS GOING TO BE TOO MUCH PRESSURE FOR HER. IN FACT, SHE CAME TO REHEARSALS AND ... IT WAS FANTASTIC. EVERYONE WAS SURPRISED AT HOW WELL SHE DID"