

Hansard's best, for the record

MUSIC

Didn't He Ramble

Glen Hansard
Anti Records



Pádraig Collins

IF you weren't looking too closely it could seem Glen Hansard had moved seamlessly from bright young upstart to acclaimed rock star. But *The Commitments* (which he acted in) and his debut album with Dublin band *The Frames* both came out in 1991.

His early success was followed by some lean years until he hit pay dirt with the charming 2006 film *Once*, for which he and Czech singer-songwriter Markéta Irglová won the Academy Award for Best Original Song with *Falling Slowly*. In 2013, the Broadway adaptation, *Once The Musical*, won eight Tony Awards including the top musical prize.

Didn't He Ramble is Hansard's second solo album, three years after *Rhythm And Repose*.

Ramble's opening track, *Grace Beneath The Pines*, is a modern Irish folk song which sets the scene for the album to come.

Wedding Ring travels back to the 1960s, to the sounds Van Morrison was creating on *Astral Weeks*, but without ever seeming like pastiche.

Winning Streak Sign, which borrows its title from an Irish game show of the 1990s, talks about the Southern Cross, so perhaps Hansard was thinking of Australia when he wrote it. Or he could be borrowing a line from 1980s metal band Dio. There's nothing metal or even hard rock about the tune though.

Her *Mercy*, the best song on a very good album, also has a touch of Van Morrison, albeit Van of the 1970s with its horns and manic passion.

The mood changes with *McCormack's Wall*, which sounds like an Irish song that could be a



century old, especially when the wedding waltz fiddles come in. It may be the soundtrack for some future Irish weddings.

Lowly Deserter is pure Americana, though, and could be a great, lost Band song. Robbie Robertson would surely approve.

There is more Americana folk with *My Little Ruin* and closing track *Stay The Road*, which brings The

Palace Brothers or early Smog to mind. In between those two is *Just To Be The One*, whose muted horns give it a touch of 1970s' cop show soundtrack and is all the better for it.

Special mention must go to the producers Thomas Bartlett (*The National*, Sufjan Stevens), a frequent collaborator of Hansard's, and Grammy winner and former

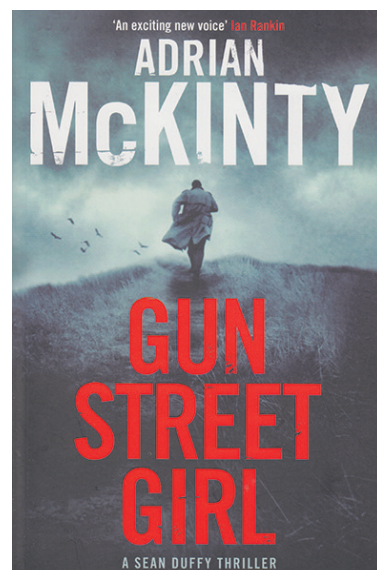
Frames bandmate David Odum (Paloma Faith, Tinariwen). They have done a beautiful job on the album, which was recorded in New York, Dublin, Chicago and France and features guest appearances by John Sheahan (*The Dubliners*), Sam Beam (*Iron And Wine*) and Sam Amidon.

Talking about the album Hansard said: "I feel I've really dug deep for

these songs, and I've been chasing specific ideas asking myself, 'What is it I'm trying to say with this line or idea?' One would hope that through all of this that you find your voice. And, amazingly, you might find it in the smallest gesture of a song."

Didn't He Ramble is as good a record as any Hansard has done in his many guises, and that's no small praise.

Detective Duffy back on the case



IF you have been following the adventures of Adrian McKinty's creation, detective Sean Duffy, you will know he has been a bit of a loose cannon in the RUC. A Catholic in what was a sectarian force at the time the stories are set, he lives in a UDA-controlled housing estate. In a note at the end of this book, McKinty says he has put his character living at the same address he himself grew up in, adding: "Duffy's neighbours are imaginary constructs bearing only a passing resemblance to the actual residents of the estate in that time period." Well, he would say that, wouldn't he?

In this latest episode, a few more bolts have come loose in Duffy's addled life. For one thing, he seems to be getting close to a problem with his consumption of cocaine and other illegal substances, some

BOOKS

Gun Street Girl

By Adrian McKinty
Allen & Unwin
323pp, \$29.99



Frank O'Shea

sifted off the top of properties confiscated from villains in the course of his work. His drinking is similarly problematic, not to mention criminally wasteful – he adds Lagavulin to his tea for

goodness sake. *Gun Street Girl* is set in 1985 at a time of widespread rioting sparked by loyalist belief that Mrs Thatcher was about to abandon them in the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Before the story is concluded, four people have died, missiles have gone missing from the Short factory in Belfast and we are reminded at the end that this was all happening at the same time that certain US officials were selling armory to Iran. Through it all, Duffy ignores politics to concentrate on the murders, annoying Special Branch and the top brass of the RUC and eventually political heavies in the North and London.

This is the best of the Duffy books, in part because McKinty seems to be enjoying himself. He wastes no time in fancy prose, keeping the action moving with clever dialogue, short sentences

and witty asides. One character has a "funny Cork accent like a donkey falling down a well"; another who comes from Derry speaks "like a cement mixer with gearbox issues".

And Duffy's romantic life has taken a turn for the worse too. He is reduced to attending a church dance party where participants are encouraged to meet and mix. Unfortunately, most of the females moved away when they discovered he was "a policeman who could be killed next week. A Catholic in Carrickfergus was bad enough, but a Catholic policeman? My life expectancy could be measured in dog years." He does find some short-lived relief through a journalist from the Belfast Newsletter, only to be jilted when she begins an affair with her boss.

Please don't kill off Inspector Duffy, Mr McK.