

FOO FIGHTERS & weezer

with
kaiser chiefs

**ON SALE
THIS SATURDAY
AT 11AM!**

october 3rd allstate arena



a jam production.



foofighters.com

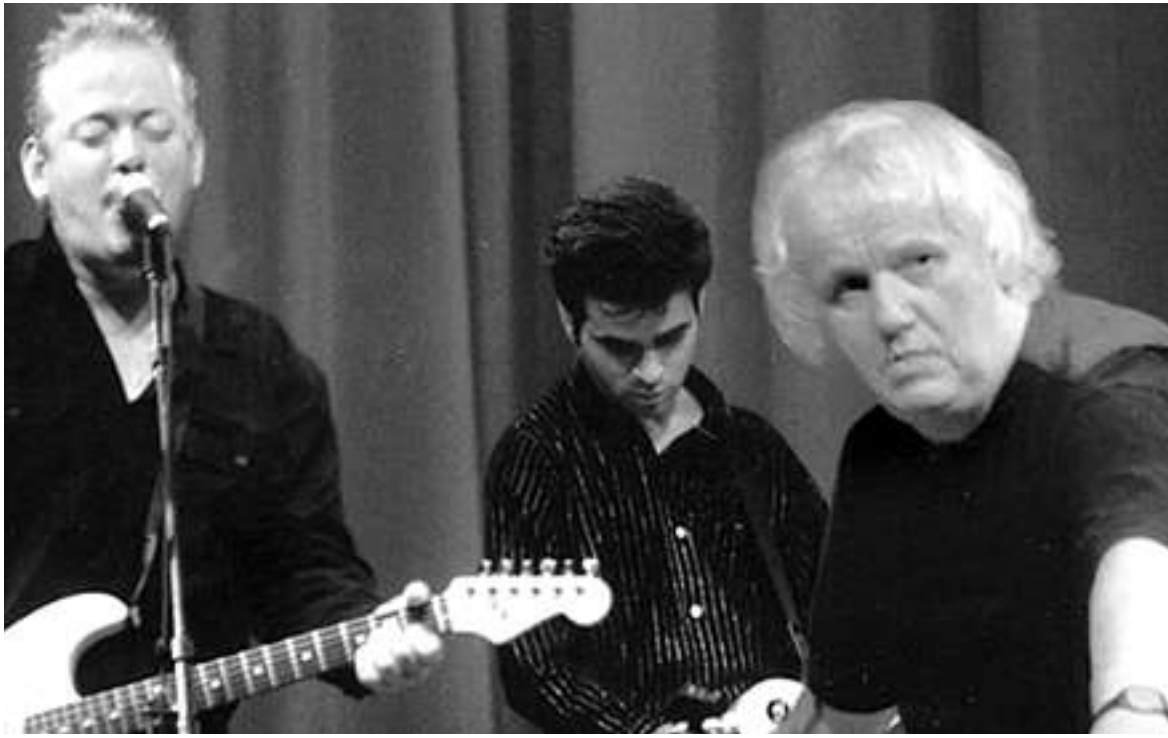
Tickets at all Ticketmaster Outlets including the Allstate Arena Box Office.
Charge-by-phone: 312-559-1212 or order online at www.ticketmaster.com



weezer.com

The Meter

themeter@chicagoreader.com
www.chicagoreader.com/TheMeter



Jon Langford, Robert Coyne, and Kevin Coyne at the Old Town School in 2002

CHRIS MCCOYREY

Carrying a Torch for Kevin

Haven't fallen in love with late English singer-songwriter Kevin Coyne yet? Jon Langford wants to help.

By Bob Mehr

Jon Langford has a lot of favorite Kevin Coyne stories. Like the one about how Elektra boss Jac Holzman called after Jim Morrison died to ask him to be the Doors' new lead singer and Coyne turned him down, unimpressed by the band and put off by the idea of wearing leather pants. And the one about how Coyne refused an invitation from Richard Branson of Virgin to write lyrics for Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* on the grounds that the music was "total rubbish."

The British singer, songwriter, painter, and author, who died in December 2004, had a sharp tongue and little taste for euphemism—his lyrics were often painfully stark, and he was on intimate terms with the outcast and reviled. Hard for the music business to make head or tail of, he never became a star, and in the U.S. he isn't even particularly well-known. But his stubborn devotion to his craft has been inspiring people like Langford for decades, and this Friday at the Hideout some of them will gather for a memorial show.

The concert will double as a CD-release party for *One Day in Chicago* (Buried Treasure), an album Coyne recorded here in December 2002 with Langford and the Pine Valley Cosmonauts. Langford, fellow Mekon Sally Timms (who covered Coyne's "I'm Just a Man" on her 2004 album *In the World of Him*), singer-songwriter Chris Connelly, and a few special unbilled guests will perform Coyne's music and read from his short stories. Some of Coyne's paintings will be exhibited, and footage from a 2002 German documentary will be screened along with video of Coyne's last American show, at the Old Town School that same year.

Born in Derby in 1944, Coyne graduated from art school in the mid-60s and went to work as a therapist and counselor for drug addicts, an experience that would forever color his work. For several years he fronted the blues-rock band Siren, which recorded for John Peel's Dandelion label, and then in the early 70s he went solo. (Langford first saw Coyne on TV in 1973: "The next day everyone in school was talking about him," he says.) Nicknamed the "English Beefheart"—a comparison he didn't care for—Coyne made his reputation on Virgin in the 70s, releasing several scabrous, thought-provoking LPs of dark, bluesy, psychedelic folk. Those albums have since influenced everyone from John Lydon to Will Oldham, who's recorded a seven-inch EP of Coyne's material and cites as a touchstone his 1979 song cycle *Babble*,

a collaboration with avant-garde singer Dagmar Krause.

Babble—which, with its lyrics about lovers who go to dangerous extremes for each other, was widely assumed to be a fictionalized portrait of the couple who committed the Moors Murders, a notorious series of child rapes and killings in the mid-60s—was one of Coyne's last records for Virgin. After leaving the label in 1981 he suffered an alcohol-induced nervous breakdown, went through a divorce, and disappeared from public view. He moved to Nuremberg, Germany, in 1985, where he met his future second wife, Helmi; with her help he sobered up and returned to art and music, as prolific as ever.

Though Langford and Coyne had been labelmates at Virgin for a brief spell in the late 70s—and though the Mekons had covered Coyne's "Having a Party," a song about being a minor artist on a major label, on the *F.U.N. '90* EP—they didn't meet until 2002, after mutual friend Brendan Croker put them in touch. "Brendan suggested he do some stuff with me," recalls Langford. "Kevin was well up for it, which was hugely flattering, because he'd been such a big hero of mine."

Coyne and his wife came to Chicago that summer, during an American tour. "I took them to the Lincoln to eat. Kevin quite liked diner food, so we had a big plate of fried stuff and this very intense conversation," says Langford, laughing. "He'd never had anything resembling a hit record, and neither had the Mekons, so we were definitely kindred spirits in that respect. We each had a sort of eagerness to continue in the face of crippling failure."

Coyne made plans to come back to Chicago that winter to play a show and cut an album with Langford and the Pine Valley Cosmonauts. He arrived in mid-December with his guitarist son, Robert, and everyone went to Kingsize Sound Labs for a single day of recording. "All the time we were setting up he looked like he was gonna explode," says Langford. "He was pacing around and uptight. . . . He wanted to go in and record something. We didn't even have the mikes set right, but he was like, 'I gotta do something now.'"

Coyne's performances seemed off-the-cuff, but Langford thought the material was way too good to be improvised. "I asked his son, 'Has he written any of this down? Has he been working on this stuff?' And his son said, 'No, he doesn't write *any* of it down. He's just making it up.' Twelve songs came out of his head that day. And if you listen to

them, they're incredible. A lot of it's so funny, and so dirty and rough as well. But that's the way he was. He was totally unfiltered, very entertaining to be with."

Ticket sales for the subsequent Old Town show were anemic, though—Coyne was still off the radar in America. "It didn't dawn on me, because in my mind he was huge," says Langford. "I literally begged, bribed, and bullied people to come down and see him, 'cause I didn't want the place to be empty. We'd only sold like 50 tickets." Coyne and the Cosmonauts ended up playing for an audience of about 200 musicians, invited guests, and die-hard fans. "Probably the best ever crowd for me in the U.S.," Coyne would later note on his Web site.

"The rest of us didn't quite know what we were doing, but it came together," says Langford. "For about a week afterward, people were phoning me up and thanking me for dragging them out, because it was such an unbelievable show." Four songs from that performance appear as bonus tracks on *One Day in Chicago*.

Langford spent the next year and a half trying to find a label to pick up the project—he still needed to add overdubs and get the recordings mixed. Then in spring 2004 he and former Rykodisc exec Peter Wright decided to launch a

Kevin Coyne Memorial
WHEN Fri 8/19, 7 PM
WHERE The Hideout,
1354 W. Wabansia
PRICE \$8
INFO 773-227-4433

Web-only label, Buried Treasure, and using its budget Langford returned to the album last winter. He and engineer Ken Sluiter were in the studio when

they heard Coyne had died. Though Coyne had known he was mortally ill with fibrosis of the lungs, he'd kept quiet about the seriousness of his illness. "He was still touring before he died, with an oxygen tank on the stage and tubes up his nose," says Langford. "He was packing his bag to go off to Vienna to play the night he passed away."

Though a memorial service was held in Germany in December, Langford wanted to honor Coyne in the States as well, and his widow Helmi agreed to come to Chicago to help. Langford also hopes to release additional live or archival Coyne recordings on Buried Treasure.

"His talent was so vast. There's so much quality in his music and his writing and his paintings," he says. "It's a bit scary, because I am sorta walking in his footprints. I only wish I was half as good as he was." ☐

The Treatment

A day-by-day guide to our Critic's Choices and other previews

friday19

VORTIS If you told me five years ago that the most compelling front man in the Chicago punk scene this decade would be a sixty-something political science professor with an anarchist ax to grind, I would've said, "Well sure, why not?" I'd like to think we're above obsessing over a guy's age just because he's not in the usual 15-to-25 punk-draftable demographic. F.T., aka Fellow Traveler, aka Mike Weinstein of Purdue University, comes at you with a fiendish gravitas, rattling off hardcore antiauthoritarian manifestos and voicing all the bad thoughts ("I want to have my own suitcase bomb") that regular folks are afraid to express these days. Onstage he works a street-preacher-Jello Biafra persona, getting in your face with wild eyes full of conviction—you just know his brain's filled with the footnotes to back up his lyrics. Vortis's forthcoming album, *Warzone*, is mean, tight, righteously pissed, and full of hooky, nasty sloganeering choruses—and if you're like me you might relish the frisson of hearing yourself chanting them. While guitarist G.Haad, bassist J.Los, and drummer D'Iyro (aka *Sun-Times* rock critic Jim DeRogatis) stay anchored in familiar punk most of the time, they also sound ready to go anywhere Weinstein might lead them, which only helps him scare audiences even more. Blackfire Revelation headlines, Thundering plays second, and Vortis opens. ► 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, 773-276-3600 or 866-468-3401, \$8. —Monica Kendrick



Abigail Washburn

ABIGAIL WASHBURN Stylistic purity doesn't seem to be much of a concern for banjoist Abigail Washburn: on her recent debut full-length, *Song of the Traveling Daughter* (Nettwerk), she blurs the boundaries between blues, bluegrass, and prewar folk and includes a pair of tunes written and sung in Chinese (she's studied and performed in China). Though she picked up the banjo only three years ago, she writes like a seasoned folklorist and has annotated her liner notes with information about the tunes she's adapted or that inspired her; her sources are the likes of Dock Boggs and Blind Willie Johnson. A number of string players, including coproducer Bela Fleck, add twangy layers to the recordings, but Washburn's voice—a striated cry that suggests a less ethereal Emmylou Harris—carries the music. The Evanston native performs with cellist Ben Sollee. Chris Smither headlines. ► 8 PM, Old Town School of Folk Music, 4544 N. Lincoln, 773-728-6000 or 866-468-3401, \$20, \$16 seniors and kids. ☐ —Peter Margasak

saturday20

JOHN WESLEY HARDING'S LOVE HALL TRYST Earlier this year singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding published a long, dense, fanciful novel about gender and the search for love, *Misfortune*, under his real name, Wesley Stace. (I reviewed it back in April.) To accompany it, last month he released *Songs of Misfortune* (Appleseed), a song cycle of traditionals and originals that fit the themes of the book, performed by Harding with Kelly Hogan, Nora O'Connor, and actor-singer Brian Lohmann as the Love Hall Tryst. Their interpretations are loose—only Leonard Cohen's "Joan of Arc" resembles something like a cover—but what really sets the group apart is their (mostly) a cappella approach. The four sing twisted, braided harmonies that turn the familiar into the unearthly and back again, much as Harding's book does. ► 7 and 10 PM, Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, 773-525-2508, \$18. —Monica Kendrick continued on page 6