



# MUSIC FOR JUSTICE OR JUST FOR FUN

## A WOMAN WITH A CAUSE

She is related to the 15th-century female Irish chieftain and rebel, Grace O'Malley, known as the Pirate Queen. She has a well-developed disregard for any sort of oppression, be it cultural, racial, sexual, religious—what have you. Her master's is in American studies, with a focus on the nuclear weapons industry's legacy of environmental racism and colonialism in New Mexico, and she teaches courses in environmental and social justice at UNM. She is singer/songwriter Eileen Shaughnessy, front woman for the indie folk band Eileen and the In-Betweens, and she sings with a warm and sunny confidence that make you believe that however dark things might look, there is a path forward to the light.

She came to both music and a sense of social justice early on in her life. Raised in an Irish Catholic family, the St. Paul, Minnesota, native says that her earliest lessons in injustice were related to the church. "The Catholic Church was a presence in my life, and in some ways it was an oppressive presence . . . the way that women were treated and gay people were treated." For inspiration against such oppression, she looks back to Celts, the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland, and her famous ancestor—"a total bad-ass," says Shaughnessy.

There was music in the house when she was growing up, and quite a few fiddlers can be found hanging out in the family tree. That may explain why, starting at age 15, it's been fairly easy for Shaughnessy to teach herself how to play a number of instruments, including drums (her first love), guitar, bass, banjo, ukulele, mandolin, and harmonica.

Shaughnessy marries her two passions in her songwriting and performing. "I'm really influenced musically by a lot of the music from the '60s and '70s . . . music that has a message," she says. She laments that she wasn't around at that time. "But it feels that we've come back around to that point where consciousness is being raised about how much destruction we are sur-

**For Eileen Shaughnessy, music is both a refuge and a tool for change.**



rounded by, and music really brings us together. It has the power to speak to directly to our hearts."

Shaughnessy recognizes that music can provide support for those who are addressing the ills of society. "Sometimes when I am teaching about these intense topics, my students will need an emotional break from learning about radiation, and all the horrible things that our government has done, and the dumps, and testing and all of that, and for me, music is the source of healing for that. So sometimes I'll sing them a song."

While Shaughnessy's songs target stubborn issues of injustice, they don't dwell on the negative. They also carry a fierce and sturdy optimism. "That's what I aspire to," she says: "not shy away from the darkness and the destruction, and really looking with open eyes at what we've done as human beings to our precious world—and still finding some sense of joy

and love, because I think that's still there."

With three full-length albums of original music already to their name and a fourth one due later this year, the band is finding widespread acceptance of its message, which was reinforced on their summer 2017 tour of Canada and the West Coast. The core In-Betweens include Lazarus Letcher on viola, Colin Baillio on bass and steel guitar, Jackie Chacón on drums, with others coming along for the ride on occasion.

How did the In-Betweens get their name? "I feel that the in-between, in general—the liminal space, the space between binaries and dualism—is really rich, and it's full of possibility, and it's a space that I identify with . . . and it rhymes with my name," says Shaughnessy.

You can get all the in-between news and contact Shaughnessy through her website ([www.eileenshaughnessy.com](http://www.eileenshaughnessy.com)) or the band's Facebook page.

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