



## NEW RELEASE news release

**Artist:** Janet Holmes  
**Album Title:** The Road to The West  
**Cat No.:** MSMCD129  
**Genre:** Singer-songwriter/Celtic rock  
**Release date:** 12.7.04  
**Label:** Market Square

**“I’ve made recordings before this but never anything serious, never anything with my name on the front, where it feels like I’m putting some part of myself on the line. You sing in pubs and on festival stages and it’s all good fun, but time drags on and people start asking why I don’t do it ‘for real’. And then I start asking myself the same question! I mean, you only live once...”**

*Janet Holmes*

### KEY POINTS

- \* Solo debut from ‘*best kept secret*’ of **Northern Ireland** music scene
- \* Guests include international trad fiddle virtuoso **Martin Hayes** (playing electric!); Ireland’s only Woodstock veteran **Henry McCullough** (Joe Cocker, Wings), (playing acoustic!); solo guitar star **Colin Reid**; and Texan prog-rock maestro **Barry Bynum**
- \* Core band includes pianist **Brian Connor** (Eleanor McEvoy/Van Morrison) and drummer **Liam Bradley** (Ronan Keating/Van Morrison) plus Irish dobro ace **Colin ‘Hillbilly’ Henry**
- \* Pre-launch concert on **Saturday June 19<sup>th</sup>** at the **Old Museum Arts Centre, Belfast**

### THE STORY

Born and raised in Belfast, **Janet Holmes** first performed aged 14 and has remained fearless onstage ever since. A teenager in the early ‘80s, she fronted **SOS**, a heavy-rock gospel group, for over ten years - recording a single, appearing often on Ulster TV, touring Scotland and supporting international gospel rock artists visiting Belfast. In the early ‘90s she recorded an EP in **Bare Bones**, an acoustic duo, and was regularly in demand as a backing vocalist on stage and record for many other local artists (including current Bob Harris fave **Brian Houston**).

Determinedly a ‘hobby musician’ during this period, things began to veer towards the pro music world with the formation in 1997 of **Bird-Dog**, fusing classic bluegrass and Irish trad with Swing-era jazz. The group’s album, **Traditional Roots**, appeared within six months and it played throughout Northern Ireland, with numerous music bar residencies and Irish festival appearances.

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#### SINGSONG ENTERTAINMENT PUBLICITY

Market House Market Square Winslow MK18 3AF United Kingdom  
Tel + 44 (0)1296 715228 Fax + 44 (0)1296 715486  
Email [peter@singsongpr.biz](mailto:peter@singsongpr.biz) [www.singsongpr.biz](http://www.singsongpr.biz)  
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After a triumph at the **European Bluegrass Festival** in Holland (1999) a track from the group's set featured on the subsequent festival CD. Broadcasts included sessions and concerts for BBC Radio Ulster, BBC Radio Scotland and Dutch radio. Janet left Bird-Dog in mid-2000 when the imminent arrival of a baby put all her musical options on hold.

Belfast-based music journalist and biographer, **Colin Harper** invited Janet to front a track with band 'project' **The Legends Of Tomorrow** for the September 2000 Market Square Records release **People On The Highway: A Bert Jansch Encomium**.

Among many others contributing to this hugely popular album was long-retired cult British R&B singer **Duffy Power**. Power was knocked out by Janet's voice and, via Harper, initiated a series of 'virtual duets', recorded in London and Belfast, for **True** (his first album in 30 years!)

Which takes us to this release: **The Road To The West** - sleeved in the beautiful, dreamlike art of pre-war Belfast art visionary **John Luke** – encompasses influences that range from the bittersweet country sound of **Emmylou Harris** to the sweet soul of **Paul Carrack**, the yearning spirit of Irish traditional music, and the glorious noise of **The Who**.

Some tracks emphasise one specific influence or another; opener 'Be The One' gets the blend just right. **Colin Harper** comments:

*"Recordings for this album took place in bursts of activity over a number of months. Along the way we had indications of interest from more than one label, and consequently we were influenced- to an extent - this way or that as to what kind of material we should be recording, what kind of sound we should be aiming for.*

*"Even within the group of people actually making the music there was, and is, a vast range of influences and hence a range of opinion. At the end of the day the twelve tracks chosen, between Colin Henry, Janet and myself, for **The Road To The West** - out of the eighteen or so recorded - represent a pretty fair consensus.*

*"Market Square mainman **Peter Muir** pointed out that **The Darkness's** album is a lean, mean 39 minutes. Not, he conceded, that that had anything to do with the price of peas. But we took his point and aimed at vinyl LP length and, right enough, it doesn't seem to outstay its welcome. But then we're biased..."*

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All interview requests to:

Contacts: **Peter Muir**; tel + 44 (0)1296 715228 email [peter@singsongpr.biz](mailto:peter@singsongpr.biz)  
**Pat Tynan** tel + 44 (0)1895 636935 email [pat@singsongpr.biz](mailto:pat@singsongpr.biz)

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Market House Market Square Winslow MK18 3AF United Kingdom  
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**Janet Holmes**  
**The Road To The West**  
**(Market Square MSCD129)**

**UK release date: 14.6.04**

**Track By Track Guide**

***with Colin Harper***

**1. Be The One**

*(Harper/Archer/Monro) IMRO*

**Janet Holmes** – vocal, backing vocal **Caroline Orr** – backing vocal **Ellen Weir** – backing vocal **Colin Harper** – acoustic guitar **James Davis** - electric guitar **Colin Henry** - dobro **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Conor Shields** – drums

And the last shall be first! This was the last recording we made for the album, recorded virtually live at Novatech Studios a couple of days before Christmas 2003 - the imperative to do so being our drummer Conor's impending knee operation on Christmas Eve. But to backtrack a little...

This was, in fact, the first song I ever recorded with Janet. The song was written in 1996 and was originally recorded by a cast of thousands for a cassette only album, ***Nothing Is Easy***, credited to the **Legends Of Tomorrows** and with Janet on lead vocal.

This track was done in a happy day and Ali brought his camera along and snapped many of the atmospheric shots that appear on this site and in the album booklet.

**2. If I Had A Boat**

*(Lyle Lovett)*

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Colin Henry** – guitar, dobro **Henry McCullough** – mandolin **Ali MacKenzie** – bass

Another staple of the live set, this is a classic slice of poignant whimsy from country music maverick **Lyle Lovett**. It sounds like a simple little three-chord trick but, as this writer finds to his shame every time we play it, the real trick is remembering *when* those three blasted chords change!

The recording was made, as was the core of the album, on one of two days at Enda Walsh's superb Amerberville Studio in the leafy lanes of County Antrim and was something of a dream come true for Colin Henry, featuring as it does a wonderful back-porch Alabama vibe with legendary guitarist **Henry McCullough** trading in his customary high-voltage electricity for a mandolin.

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### 3. Dreams

(Terry Woods)

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Colin Henry** – acoustic guitar **Colin Reid** – lead acoustic guitar **Brian Connor** – piano **Ali MacKenzie** - bass **Liam Bradley** – drums, percussion

A song written by Irish folk-rock legend **Terry Woods** (Sweeney's Men, Steeleye Span, The Woods Band, The Pogues). It originally featured on the second and final Sweeney's Men LP **The Tracks Of Sweeney** (1969) and was later revamped, featuring vocalist Gay Woods, for the eponymous 1971 LP from The Woods Band. Our version was recorded pretty much live, with Belfast fingerstyle guitar hero Colin Reid and with valuable production ideas from both Ali MacKenzie and the inimitable **Brian Connor**.

### 4. Gone

(Holmes/Henry) *IMRO*

**Janet Holmes** – vocal, backing vocal **Colin Henry** – guitar, dobro **Brian Connor** – electric piano **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Colin Harper** – chimes

A rare - indeed, thus far unique - co-written composition from Janet and **Colin 'Hillbilly' Henry** and one that we perform now with a more perambulatory bass, brushed drums and a dash of swing. **Brian Connor** proves the less-is-more aesthetic here with the barest handful of exquisitely placed chords.

### 5. The Fields Of July

(Harper) *IMRO*

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Conor Shields** – backing vocal **Barry Bynum** – electric guitar **Colin Henry** – dobro **Brian Connor** – piano **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Liam Bradley** – drums

This was one of three songs written during a wonderful week at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, an artists' retreat at Lake Annaghmakerrig in County Monaghan. I was supposed to be working on a biographical project but the lure of a sound-proofed room and a grand piano proved irresistible.

### 6. Letting Go

(Harper) *IMRO*

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Colin Harper** – acoustic & electric guitars **Martin Hayes** – violin **Cormac O'Cathain** – Korg Trinity **Michael Keeney** – piano **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Liam Bradley** – drums

Written and originally recorded long before I heard The Corrs (honest!), this is one of three tracks (the others being 'When You Needed' and 'The Wind & The Rain') on the album to be based on elements recorded during 1996 for the Legends Of Tomorrow project with Clare - born, Seattle-based fiddle genius **Martin Hayes**.

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With Martin's permission, we've built Janet's version of the song with entirely new electric guitar, piano, bass and drums, retaining the original acoustic guitar and keyboard parts. The acoustic guitar, incidentally, is tuned to English folk legend **Martin Carthy's** CGCDGA invention and the whole thing comes about as close as anything to my initial concept for the album - a concept not necessarily shared by Janet, or indeed by anyone else - to sound like 'wistful hillbilly music played by **The Who**'.

## 7. When You Needed

(Harper) IMRO

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Colin Harper** – acoustic guitar **Cormac O'Cathain** – Korg Trinity **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Liam Bradley** – drums

Another of the trio of substantially revamped 1996 recordings referred to above. In this case we kept the guitar part (in CGCDGA) and keyboard strings, but I took the opportunity to rewrite the bulk of the lyric - all but the first and last few lines. **Ali MacKenzie** came up with the notion of giving what was previously a rather fragile, Nick Drake-ish arrangement a relentless, Status Quo-ish backbone.

This tectonic plate within the musical elements and the dichotomy between Janet's poised vocal and the anguish in the lyric make it probably my own favourite of all the recordings we've made together.

## 8. Love Will Keep Us Alive

(Paul Carrack)

**Janet Holmes** – vocal, backing vocal **Henry McCullough** – acoustic guitar **Brian Connor** – piano, Hammond organ **Ali MacKenzie** – bass

Just a great song by **Paul Carrack**, soul-man and sometime member of Ace, Squeeze and Mike & The Mechanic, featuring **Brian Connor** on piano and the wonderfully left-field guitar of **Henry McCullough**.

## 9. The Wind & The Rain

(Harper) IMRO

**Janet Holmes** – vocal **Colin Harper** – acoustic guitar **Cormac O'Cathain** – electric piano **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Liam Bradley** – drums, percussion

This was written circa 1989/90 - and, most remarkably, in about as long as it takes to play it. The funny thing is, much as I seemed to spend the late '80s and most of the '90s in various states of hopelessly unrequited love this isn't as far as I can recall, about any one situation. Janet sings it beautifully and the tension between the spirit of the piece and Liam's **Velvet Underground** approach to the rhythm is compelling.

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## 10. How Soon Is Now?

(Morrissey/Marr)

**Janet Holmes** – vocals **Colin Harper** – acoustic guitars **Barry Bynum** – electric guitar **Colin Henry** – banjo **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Liam Bradley** - drums

A classic track from **The Smiths** - and one that, as far as I was concerned, was simply crying out for something approaching a bluegrass treatment.

It helped, of course, that guitar hero **Barry Bynum**, formerly of '70s Texas prog-rock-gospel band **Liberation Suite**, happened to be holidaying in Northern Ireland at the time and made himself available for this track.

## 11. People On The Highway

(Jansch)

**Janet Holmes** – vocal, backing vocal **Colin Harper** – acoustic guitar **Colin Reid** – lead acoustic guitar **Colin Henry** – banjo **Ali MacKenzie** – bass **Conor Shields** – congas, percussion

Notwithstanding the 1996 recording of 'Be The One', this was where it all began for us. Somewhere in between the writing and the publication of my **Bert Jansch** biography **Dazzling Stranger: Bert Jansch and the British folk and blues revival** (Bloomsbury, 2000), discussions between Market Square supremo Peter Muir and myself led to the notion of organising a tribute album to the man, to feature covers of his songs from his peers and admirers in the music world past and present.

Such was the response that the album, eventually titled **People On The Highway: A Bert Jansch Encomium**, became a double. One of the perks of compiling such a project, it included a one-off (we thought!) ensemble I'd brought together for the purpose, covering this bittersweet offering from the final Pentangle LP **Solomon's Seal** (1972).

Reviving that **Legends Of Tomorrow** name, the opportunity brought together various Belfast-based musicians I admired - not least guitarist and gentleman **Colin Reid**, whose career as a solo touring and recording artist had just recently taken off with terrific publicity and momentum - but who had, in most cases, previously never worked with each other. Together, with **Martin Hayes** overdubbing his part in Seattle, we created a sincere, joy-to-record doff of the cap to a truly great musician.

Also on the tribute album was '60s British R&B legend **Duffy Power**, who immediately recognised Janet's voice as something special. From that basis, we found ourselves, more or less as the same ensemble but with the addition of pianist Brian Connor, contributing to tracks for a new (and still forthcoming) Duffy Power album.

And out of that, to cut a long story short, came **The Road To The West** - the first album, hopefully the first of many, to give **Janet Holmes** her place in the sun.

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## 12. Thanksgiving Eve

(Franke)

Janet Holmes – vocal Colin Henry - dobro

Possibly the only vocal/dobro duet in recorded history to the best of Colin Henry's knowledge. Janet learned this song from the late guitarist and songwriter Isaac Guillory, who played one of his last gigs at the Ards Guitar Festival. A lovely man, taken too soon.

### Also recorded but...

- ❖ 'Long, Long, Long' - a beautiful, neglected **George Harrison** song from **the Beatles' White Album**;
- ❖ 'First Song' - a **Ralph McTell** number, with Colin Reid on guitar, previously recorded by Janet on the **Bird-Dog** album **Traditional Roots**;
- ❖ An alternative version of 'Dreams' with **Gay & Terry Woods** adding vocal and cittern;
- ❖ 'Ride, Ride' - **Anne Briggs'** take on the American trad song 'Railroad Bill', recorded on her 1971 CBS album, and recorded by us in rockabilly style;
- ❖ 'Out On The Western Plain' - the classic **Leadbelly** cowboy song, best-known perhaps in its **Rory Gallagher** arrangement, and recorded by us as a duet featuring Janet and alternative rock icon **Paul Archer** of **The Ghears**.
- ❖ 'Against The World', a Colin Harper original featuring Liam Bradley's too -rarely-heard **Keith Moon** impersonation and a blistering dobro break from **Colin 'Hillbilly' Henry**.
- ❖ Also demoed, by Harper and pianist **Brian Connor**, for possible inclusion were arrangements of fabulous American 'new country' singer -songwriter **Buddy Mondlock's** 'Heavy Coat' and **Jethro Tull's** 1970 single 'Inside', in curiously skiffle-esque form.

Maybe next time...

Colin Harper, Belfast April 2004

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All interview requests to:

Contacts: Peter Muir; tel + 44 (0)1296 715228 email [peter@singsongpr.biz](mailto:peter@singsongpr.biz)  
Pat Tynan tel + 44 (0)1895 636935 email [pat@singsongpr.biz](mailto:pat@singsongpr.biz)