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Dan-tastic Directing duo deliver fantasy classic on shoestring budget Pages 28&29

Lifestyle

Guitarist Gary Lucas tells **Tanya Sweeney** about collaborating with the iconic American singer and his attempts to unearth the heir to his throne at his gigs

ary Lucas isn't a name that trips off the tongue of your average rock music fan. He's a man that can walk down the street and remain largely unbothered, but you almost certainly know his music. Amid releasing over 50 albums and collaborating with artists like Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and Nick Cave, Lucas is also the man behind two standout tracks on one of the most universally adored albums in music history.

If you know and love Jeff Buckley's only studio album *Grace*, Lucas' signature guitar playing can be heard on *Mojo Pin* and *Grace*, the songs he co-wrote with Buckley. In the end, Lucas wrote over a dozen songs with Buckley, some of which were released in 2002 as an album, *Songs To No One*.

"All of our songs began as my guitar instrumentals — that's something people may not know," says Lucas in a Zoom call from the very New York apartment where he co-wrote those songs. "How I worked with him was I would, separate from Jeff, compose these pieces thinking of his voice, and I would send them to him on cassette via snail mail.

"He would get them and normally he would call and say, 'I'm gonna put some melody and lyrics on this'. That's how we divided up the labour there."

As Buckley was hailed as a mighty singersongwriter during his lifetime, Lucas felt himself become further removed from the origin story of those two songs.

"Columbia Records sort of disappeared me out of the [story] — they issued a press release that mentioned almost everyone down to the janitor in the studio," Lucas say. The slight still stings. "I just take the time to try and remind people I was there, in a nice way. I'm just happy to be out there to remind people of Jeff's brilliance."

The two met back in the early 90s at a tribute night at St Ann's Church in Brooklyn for Jeff's father Tim Buckley. Jeff was a relative unknown, still trying to shake off the shadow of the folk singer father whom he'd barely known. At that point, Yale-educated Lucas was an established guitarist and member

I hand him a mike and he opens his mouth to sing. It's just unearthly.... I was blown away'



'I hope that I find the next Jeff Buckley out there'

of Captain Beefheart — something that endeared him to the young singer.

"This kid just walks up to me and he's pumping his eyes — he's really, like, electric. He's making faces and dancing around me," says Lucas. "I'm like, 'this must be Jeff', because I knew he was coming and he just looked like a much younger Tim. We had this great moment and he was just super enthusiastic."

A day later, Buckley went to Lucas's apartment to work on a cover of *The King's Chain*, one of Tim's last recordings before his own death in 1975, aged 28.

"I hand him a mike and he opens his mouth to sing," says Lucas. "It's just unearthly. He's wailing and he's really possessed and he's hitting all these really high notes. I was just blown away. He looked over at me sheepishly and he said, 'was it any good?'. I just said, 'man, you're a f***ing star'. Believe it or not, he sort of needed reinforcement in those days."

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At the time, Buckley was a guitar tech with the touring band for The Commitments, alongside Kenneth McCluskey, the Dubliner who played Derek 'Meatman' Scully in the hit film. It was during the New York date of this tour that Lucas and Buckley worked

this tour that Lucas and Buckley worked on a song called *Rise Up To Be*, which would eventually become *Grace*. After parting ways with The Commitments band, Buckley joined Lucas's band Gods & Monsters for a short spell before deciding he wanted to go solo.

According to Lucas, his time in The Commitments touring band wasn't the only Irish connection Buckley had. In addition to his iconic performance at New York bar Sin É (run by Dubliner Karl Geary), Irish influences writ large

across his music.
"He reflected so much of the Irish tradition of

great singers — I mean, you got John McCormack, and he loved people like The Pogues." Katell Keineg, the Breton-Welsh singer who made Ireland her base for many years, also sang at Buckley's funeral in 1997.

Jeff was just 30 and was working on the follow-up to his massively successful debut album, with varying degrees of success, when he went swimming fully dressed in Memphis's Wolf River Harbour and drowned. His death caused shockwaves across the world, with fans anguished at the thought that the singer was cut down at the prime of his life, with so much more to offer creatively. For Lucas, a friend and collaborator, the news was especially hard.

"I got a call from my friend, who said, 'I've got some really tragic news. Jeff's missing'. I just shrieked," Lucas says. "I was in denial, thinking he'd maybe played a prank. You know, he was capable of that, he was kind of a joker. And then the body turned up. I cried every day for about a month. I never got a chance to say the things I would have said, had we had another encounter."

Two months before his death, Buckley played a secret gig at the Knitting Factory in New

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'Had there not been so much pressure on him, he might still be here'

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York. "He was onstage and he said, 'Gary Lucas, will you please come up here to the stage', and we did *Grace* and I brought the house down," Lucas says. "I was like, 'that meant so much to me. Thank you'. He told me he was going to Memphis the day after.

"About a month after that, I get a call from Jeff's A&R guy at Columbia Records to say, 'you may be getting a call to come to Memphis to work with Jeff because *Grace* was such a beautiful thing'. I was like, 'okay I was hoping that would happen, but I wasn't going to put any pressure on Jeff.

"I've learned the hard way, the more I would pursue Jeff, or anyone really, to do anything... it's usually not a good look. So I was hoping to hear from Jeff, but in a let's see-what-happens way.

"Had there not been so much pressure

on him to come up with a commercial follow-up album, he might still be here. But again, it's all speculation.

May 29 marks the 25th anniversary of his death and Lucas will spend that night in Dublin's Whelan's venue, celebrating the life and music of Buckley (he hits Galway's Róisín Dubh the night before). Lucas likes to collaborate with local artists at venues and will present a personal look at his collaborations with Buckley, projecting rare archival footage of the pair together.

"I'm going to bring up [to the stage] whoever Whelan's has come up with as their designated singers," he says. "I've loved playing alongside anyone who has a real burning desire to sing these songs on

"I like to do these events because it just reinvigorates the material. I give them a shot. I've had some great success, and had some people who were maybe not the best. but I think it takes a lot of spunk to get up there on stage and sing because [Jeff's] vocals are pretty iconic.

Of course, a small part of Lucas hopes that someone will take the stage during one of these dates and blow him away, just as Buckley did. "What I just love to do is keep these collaborations going," he says. "I do hope that such a person is out there.'

I Heart Jeff Buckley Feat Gary Lucas is on May 28 at Róisín Dubh, Galway, and Whelan's, Dublin, on May 29. Gary Lucas's autobiography Touched By Grace is out



fans get up onstage to sing Buckley's songs PHOTO: NICU CHERCIU

Film reviews

Your guide to all the week's latest releases ★★★★☆ Excellent ★★★☆☆ Good ★★☆☆☆ Mediocre

Film of the week

'The Daniels' teach Marvel a lesson in fantasy storytelling

Everything Everywhere All At Once

re you living your best

Kwan and Scheinert deliver one of the most creative and enjoyable movies you'll see this year on a fraction of the budget, says Paul Whitington

possible life? In Everything Everywhere All At Once. Michelle Yeoh's character Evelyn is reminded early and often that she is living her worst. Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's hectic comic fantasy has more ideas than it knows what to do with, chief among them the notion that in parallel universes, different and possibly better versions of ourselves exist.

When first we meet her, Evelyn Wang is subsisting in the most mundane of all possible universes. Living above the tatty laundromat she runs with her husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan), Evelyn spends most of her time arguing with customers and worrying about money: she's in the process of being audited by the IRS and is also struggling to deal with the fact that her daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu)

is gay. Nobody is feeling particularly gay when they file into the IRS's offices to be given a stern dressing down by Deirdre Beaubeirdra (Jamie Lee Curtis), a pedantic harpy with a terrifying pudding-bowl fringe.

The Wangs have not been keeping their accounts as they should: Evelyn has been claiming strange things as business expenses her filing system is chaotic; and one key receipt ends up getting stuck to her shoe.

Deirdre is about to read her the riot act when something rather strange happens. Waymond, or rather an altogether more dynamic version of him from another dimension, appears from nowhere to tell Evelyn that the multiverse is in deadly peril and only she can save it.

A god-like sorceress called Jobu Tupaki has developed the ability to jump at will between universes and created a black hole which may at any moment swallow everything.

Evelyn is just digesting this grim news when IRS frump Deirdre, or rather a multiverse combat version, attacks and tries to kill the Wangs, who somehow manage to escape.

Evelyn is subsequently taught how to defend herself and also learns the art of jumping between universes, where she sees other and invariably better versions of herself: a happy Evelyn in a loving gay relationship with Deirdre, of all people; a great chef; an acclaimed singer; even a glamorous movie

star who looks a lot like Michelle Yeoh. As impressive as all these alternate versions are, none have managed to defeat Jobu Tupaki and save the multiverse — somehow, laundromat Evelyn will have to find a way.

The multiverse concept has been flogged to death in recent years, most tiresomely in the Marvel franchise.
But while films like Spider-Man: No Way

Home and Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness have \$200m budgets to throw at the challenges raised by astral voyaging, Kwan and Scheinert had barely \$25m to bring their crazy schema to life.

Instead of cutting edge CGI, 'The Daniels' resort to sheer bloody-minded ingenuity and invention, and the grace and talent of their leading lady Yeoh, who carries this wild and ragged but ultimately irresistible film.

Part fantasy, part martial arts saga, part satire, part family melodrama, Everything

Instead of cutting edge CGI, 'The Daniels' resort to sheer bloody-minded ingenuity and invention

Everywhere, All At Once explodes into life from the opening frame, constantly challenging us to comprehend and process the jumbling

images flitting past us.
At times, the overall effect is like watching someone flick through a storyboard at the speed of light, but salty wit and the steadying performance of Yeoh give us just about ough to cling to.

Ke Huy Quan (Short Round from Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom!) is very good as Evelyn's downtrodden but resourceful husband, and Jamie Lee Curtis relishes the cartoonish comedy inherent in her character

The Daniels' chaotic feature outstays its welcome by a good 20 minutes, and starts rehashing its own jokes, but as a sustained exercise in high-wire creativity, it is

And Yeoh brings heart and nathos to a character that might have been twodimensional in the hands of a less intelligent



Benediction

(12A, 137mins)

Of the Great War poets, Siegfried Sassoon was perhaps the angriest, the most significant. After entering the service in a rush of patriotism in 1914, he became a decorated war hero, but also a fierce critic of the conflict, exposing its true horrors in verse.

Raised in privilege, his wealth could not protect him from the psychological trauma of war, as Terrence Davies' sumptuous, elegiac drama *Benediction* makes clear. Jack Lowden is well cast as the young Sassoon, who tries to come to terms with all he has seen during a forced convalescence.

To add to his difficulties, Siegfried is gay and endures several unhappy relationships with men like Ivor Novello before retreating to the safety of a convenient marriage.

Peter Capaldi is the older Sassoon

dried up and disillusioned, struggling with his newly revived Catholic faith. There's an austere formality to Davies' film which suits its sombre subject well, and Lowden is outstanding as the great but tortured poet, whose youth and peace of mind were shattered by the



Rakel Lenora Fløttum plays



The Innocents

(15A, 117mins)

If horror's job is to unsettle, The Innocents does so masterfully. Made on a shoestring by Eskil Vogt, the film is set in a high rise Norwegian housing estate, which doesn't initially seem like too bad a place to live.

There's a lake and wood nearby, and when nine-year-old Ida (Rakel Lenora Fløttum) moves into an apartment with her family, she quickly makes friends. Ida's older sister Anna (Alva Brynsmo Ramstad) is non-verbal autistic and Ida resents the attention she gets.

When asked to bring Anna for walks Ida abandons her and plays with Ben (Sam Ashraf), a bright but worryingly spiteful boy with telekinetic powers.
Meanwhile, Anna begins to mysteriously emerge from her shell after meeting Aisha (Mina Yasmin Bremseth Asheim), a younger girl who can read her mind.

The Innocents toys with the notion that children might just be innate.

The film is mostly shot from three feet off the ground and shows us how children are mostly misunderstood by adults and instinctively keep each other's



Modern Morals

Katie Byrne answers your ethical dilemmas

My friend's dull partner will ruin my 60th birthday. Can I not invite her?

I am due to celebrate my 60th birthday later this year and have planned a weekend away at a lovely cottage in the West with a close group of friends. We are all couples who have been friends for decades.

One of our group was widowed five years ago and in the past 18 months, she has started seeing a new partner.

He's a nice man, but he has a tendency to completely dominate any group conversation he's involved in. He has a very niche hobby, that no one else knows anything about or has any interest in, but he can talk about this hobby for literally hours on end. It is exhausting for everyone else and it completely changes the dynamic of our group get-togethers.

I am glad that my friend has found love again, and it's obvious he makes her very happy. However, I can't cope with the idea of his being there for the whole weekend of my special birthday and I feel certain he will all but ruin it.

I feel very tempted not to invite this couple now, but I know she would be dreadfully hurt if we did this. Perhaps I could ask her to come on her own? What should I do?

Weekends away become harder to organise, the older we get. Add the pandemic to the mix and the possibility of drop-outs and no-shows becomes ever more likely.

Considered from this point of view, I can understand why you don't want to jeonardise this precious get-together with your closest friends. At the same time, a precious friendship is at stake and vou're probably right in thinking your friend will be hurt if you don't invite her new partner.

I shared your dilemma with midlife coach Alana Kirk, who says the great thing about being at this age is "the ability to know what really matters" However, she also notes that the decision you ultimately make may lead to upset. "It isn't easy to accept someone new into a long-established friendship group, especially when they 'replace' someone who is no doubt missed," she says. "Conversely, it might not be easy for him to join a close



harmony in a group of couples PICTURE POSED

group. He could possibly be intimidated and is overcompensating... You say he makes your friend very happy, so you don't think he's wrong for her, just wrong for your group and, in particular, this weekend."

Kirk says both of the options you've $suggested-not\ inviting\ this\ couple\ or\ only$ inviting your friend — will likely lead to resentment. "So perhaps your third option is to have an uncomfortable conversation with her first before you make a unilateral

"Explain your concerns in a way that shows her you are happy for her, but that you feel the group dynamic is being affected. Tell her how important this weekend is to you and how you want to feel relaxed, knowing everyone will get along and be involved. Ask her what she thinks. At least then, whatever action is taken it has been done with both parties having been given the chance to take responsibility for the solution."

I also shared your dilemma with cognitive behaviour therapist/psychotherapist Susi Lodola, who wonders if you've tried to look at this situation from every perspective.
"From a psychological viewpoint and how

we function as human beings, we know that it is never a situation or a person that makes us feel a certain way, but the way we assess or interpret a situation," she says.

"In your mind, you can see how this person is exhausting everyone by talking about his hobby and he is going to dominate and change the dynamic of your weekend. The thoughts about how your weekend is going to turn out are now causing you emotiona difficulties."

Lodola says there are two things we can do when we experience emotional difficulties. "Firstly, it's important to remember that we can't control what other people do — you can

Explain your concerns in a way that shows her you are happy for her, but that you feel the group dynamic is being affected'

only control your own behaviour. To help you decide, write down the things that are in your control. For example, is there an action you can take before you go away? Could you ask your friend to have a word with him before the weekend?

"Could you ask someone in the party to steer conversations away when he talks too long about his hobby? Or can you steer the conversation yourself? Maybe a girls-only weekend is the answer or there is, of course the option of not inviting him."

Secondly, she encourages you to look at the situation differently. "For example, will there be activities over the weekend where he won't have a chance to dominate? How likely is it that he will dominate conversation all the time or is it possible that it will be only some of the time? If that is the case, would you still feel that you can't cope with him being there?"

International life & relationship coach Laura Rinnankoski points out that while we can be happy for a friend who has found a new partner, "we don't choose the partners of our friends, so there can of course be personality clashes"

However, she thinks being honest is the pest solution here. "You have two options," she says. "Not to invite them and hurt your friend in the process, or the second option is to have an honest conversation with your friend about her partner. These conversations are not easy, but many times, they are

"Once you talk about the situation honestly and openly, then you can decide what to do ogether. You can come up with different solutions... you may decide to have a separate birthday celebration with them."

So a frank conversation is in order. Or as Kirk puts it: "You may ultimately have to decide which is more important to you: the friendship, the group or this weekend. But nopefully with honesty and openness, no one has to sacrifice too much"

If you have a dilemma, email k.byrne@