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IN THE PICTURE: Chris Singleton with his prized photograph of John Lennon the day he first met

Chris is snap happy for Beatles

DUBLIN-BORN Chris Singleton is the latest Irish singer-songwriter tipped for the top. His debut album, *Twisted City*, a concept album based around stories on the London Underground, has gained plaudits in all the right places with its mixture of melody, intelligence and sonic innovation and idiosyncrasy.

Just as a lot of people think there's something special about Chris, his object of desire is also exceptional and has value beyond his own personal emotional investment. As he explains, the most precious item he possesses is an early photograph that marks the occasion of the very first meeting between John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

"The actual photo is of John Lennon the day he met Paul McCartney in St Peter's Woolton Parish Church in Liverpool," says Chris. "It was taken was July 6, 1957. It's a picture of Lennon up on stage with the Quarrymen, the band he was in before The Beatles. The photo is off the original negative and is signed by the photographer, Chris Rhind, so there's a value to it in monetary terms, but because my interest in music was kickstarted by hearing *Revolver* when I was 11, the photo has all kinds of other resonance for me, too."

"After this particular show by



OBJECT OF DESIRE

Patrick Brennan

Lennon, he was introduced to McCartney. Paul played him Eddie Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock* and Lennon was sufficiently impressed by what he heard that he invited Paul to join The Quarrymen.

On October 18, 1957, Paul McCartney made his debut with The Quarrymen.

"When you throw into this mix the fact that the photograph was a present from my mother on my 25th birthday — she knew a friend of Chris Rhind and managed to persuade him to part with it — then you can see just how valuable the thing is to me personally. She gave it to me before I left for London to try to make it as a musician."

Chris has a very Catholic taste in music and cites the likes of Bowie and Marc Bolan, along with The Velvet Underground and Bob Dylan as influences besides The Beatles. He also spent a lot of time singing in choirs as he was growing up and still appreciates the training in harmony and musical arrangements his choir singing has given him.

He was also learning classical piano before he decided to pick up a guitar.

"My dad is a musician and he was in a lot of bands in the 60s, so there was always a lot of music on in the house," says Chris. "I played in some bands when I was in Trinity College as well, but I suppose the big move for me was going to London four years ago. There was something about the sound of *Revolver*, though, that was so different to anything else I'd heard up to then. I know now about all those tape loops, compressed drums and backward guitars, but when I was 11 it was like an alarm bell went off in my head."

It wasn't all plain sailing for Chris once he had settled in London. One of the biggest and somewhat unusual obstacles he had to overcome was an acute hearing affliction called hyperacusis. Chris found he couldn't bear loud noises of any description. To make matters worse,

much of the advice he received about how to treat the illness was of the wrong variety.

"Essentially, I developed an over-sensitivity to sound, possibly through listening to music too loud," says Chris. "For two years, everyday noises seemed horrendously harsh. The worst offenders were things like toilet flushes, showers, telephones and bus brakes. The way I dealt with it — and the worst way to deal with it in most cases — was by wearing earplugs. This just makes the problem worse, as when you take the earplugs out, everything seems even louder than when you put the plugs in."

"Eventually, I got really good treatment on the NHS in England. I got hearing therapy, which is a mix of hearing tests and hearing counselling. I was really sceptical about this at first, because I couldn't see how a 'hearing shrink' was going to help matters, but actually it was brilliant. I just needed reassurance that there was nothing permanently wrong with my hearing, good advice about not wearing earplugs, and some relaxation techniques. The problem was that I had convinced myself my ears were effectively 'broken', and the more I thought this, the worse things got. Once I got some reassurance that my ears were OK, they started being OK."

In spite of having hyperacusis during the making of the album, Chris nevertheless delivered the extremely impressive *Twisted City*.

"The album is loosely conceived as a tube journey through London," says Chris. "Every song is a stop on the line and is about a place, person or experience in the city. It's a concept album in the loosest sense of the word, but it does have a very 'travel' or 'London' theme to it. There are lots of tube noises on it, too. I went down into the Underground with a microphone and minidisc recorder, so there's snippets of conversations, closing doors, train departure announcements and so on on it. I looked like a nutter doing it."

"Launching the album on the London Underground helped attract a lot of attention in the UK and then this travelled across to Ireland. My ambitions for the future are really just caught up in touring *Twisted City*. I'm playing gigs in some other strange places, such as a bus. There will be further single releases later in the year and I'm looking forward to coming back to play *Crawdaddy* in April in Dublin. I'll also be recording some new tracks in Berlin later this year."

Twisted City on Brownpaper Records/Universal. The single *Get Up/Twisted City* is out now.