

Mp3 Kevin Connolly - Mystery Water



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New York Times... "Connollys music cuts a fairly wide swath through pop music culture, touching on everything from blues to folk to country to rock and often a combination of all four" 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk Pop, COUNTRY: Country Folk Details: Writing and performing for almost twenty years, Kevin Connolly has carved out his own way of writing American songs and earned a reputation as a passionate performer. Connolly has toured extensively in the U.S. and Europe behind his 6 previous releases, while maintaining a strong presence and tie to his New England roots. Working the college and coffeehouse circuit solo, Kevin has also played major festivals including Newport Folk, SXSW, Kerrville Folk and Bumbershoot. He has opened up for a long list of notable artists including Indigo Girls, Huey Lewis, Todd Rundgren and Joan Osborne. Locally, Kevin plays a lot with his band that includes the talents of Ducky Carlise (drums), Chris Rival (guitar), Scott Corneille (bass). Kevins songs have also appeared on network television in episodes of NBCs First Watch and in films like Danny Aiello's Mojave Moon. Raised on Bostons South Shore, Kevin comes from a musical family with composer/brother Jim Connolly a fixture of the West Coast New Music scene. Early influences like John Prine, Tom Waits and Bob Dylan remain inspirations and guiding forces. Writing descriptive songs that capture something about regular life in America today has been a running theme and preoccupation. For more information and a full discography visit kevinconnolly MUSIC SCENE: FOR CONNOLLY, ANYTHINGS POSSIBLE By JAY N. MILLER For The Patriot Ledger 12/3/05 Not every songwriter becomes a chart-busting MTV star, just like not every novelist ends up topping the best-seller list. And just as sometimes the most rewarding books are those that were undiscovered treasures, often the most moving music comes without the benefit of a national advertising campaign or heavy airplay. Marshfield native Kevin Connolly plumbs the same heartland Americana musical soil as Bruce Springsteen, John Mellencamp, Dave Alvin and Steve Earle, but with

the added resonance of being a native New Englander. His 1995 album *Little Town* was virtually a musical memoir of growing up in MarshVegas, and his newest album leads with a semi-autobiographical tune called *Castle Island*. Connolly's latest album, *Mystery Water* is just out on his own Real Records label, and he's performing Saturday night at Tir Na Nog in Somerville. He'll also be playing at The Abbey Lounge in Somerville on Dec. 14. Far away from the megamillion-dollar stadium, rock-star world, working musicians have to make the kind of decisions Connolly made in 1999. Just about the time my daughter turned 2, my wife suggested I get a job, Connolly said, with a hint of a laugh, from his Lexington home. I might have considered that a shock at one time, but I think part of my evolution artistically was simply changing my perspective. I was ready to accept the idea, so I stopped playing and traveling full time, like I had been doing for years. I've been kind of underground since then, getting this family thing going. I've adjusted my ambition: to become a strong regional artist. I'll go off and play a two- or three-day weekend sometimes, but mainly I can find all kinds of places to play within a two or three-hour drive. That meant wife Liza, daughter Lyla, now 9, and son Nicholas, 6, get to see a lot more of dad. And thanks to experience that began in Marshfield, Connolly found a satisfying day job. After stints working at WEEI and WBCN, he is now the general sales manager at WROR in Boston. My radio background stems from working at WATD, which was right across the street from the high school, as a kid in high school, Connolly said. I began writing sports copy for Bill Wilhelm (WATD's sports director), and continued coming back there during my summers home from college. (DJ) Dick Pleasants is the guy who really introduced me to folk music, and were still good friends. But having the radio career allows me to focus on my family, and not have to exact a living out of music. I get to go on family vacations, see my kids every night, and it sure beats staying in a Motel 6 every night. The latest CD is Connolly's seventh release in a career that spans 20 years. Previous efforts, such as *Little Town*, used a full band for a muscular folk-rock sound. Connolly still plays a lot of his local gigs with a quartet that includes Scott Rival on guitar, Ducky Carlisle on drums and Scott Corneille on bass. But his new album is a stripped-down acoustic project, with Connolly and Steve Sadler, the multi-instrumentalist most often found playing with the Swinging Steaks, and some percussion from Carlisle, who also produced the CD. His model for the album was Rick Rubin's American recording sessions with Johnny Cash, which presented the late icon in the starkest, simplest and ultimately most evocative terms. When I'm playing with a band, people invariably come up after the show and ask me for two things, said Connolly. One; they want to hear the sound of the band of record,

and then two; they want to hear just me and my guitar doing these songs. That was really the impetus for this album, a desire to keep it simple and not add effects, using technology only for editing. I didnt want to go back musically, especially, he explained. I wanted to explore a new approach to recording, focusing more on just acoustic guitar and my voice. I think it is often easy to get carried away by all the different colors you can have with more instruments. The theme of this recording is very simple and boiled down music. I will continue to play some gigs with bands, but Im also open to doing more intimate coffeehouse settings - although not being exactly folk about it. Connollys work has been described by the New York Times as touching on everything from blues to folk to country to rock - and often a combination of all four ... He likes his music to be called Americana. That Americana category hadnt really blossomed when I released my last album, he said, referring to 2001s Long Conversations. If we agree that it refers to American songwriting that utilizes American roots influences like jazz, blues, country, and whatever else, then its a label Im really comfortable with. The new CDs 11 songs include nine new Connolly originals. He also covers Ray Bonneville's Listen, a jaunty reverie about a crystal ball, and Lucinda Williams Blue. Among the originals, Castle Island deals with the struggles Connollys father had when he returned from the Korean War and tried to find work in Boston. Its overlaid with an aura of menace and barely concealed strife of a hardscrabble workingmans life in South Boston and Dorchester at that time. Mystery Water is a youthful reminiscence, evoking the endless horizons and carefree attitude of growing up, and its Marshfield echoes are certainly there, if undefined. Along the Wall is a warm, poignant memoir of a departed friend, with the heart-tugging image of the survivor musing that they never wrote their names together on a wall they often passed. I think you have an unlimited amount of songwriting material right under your nose, from your own experience, Connolly said. There is a certain thread between Little Town and Mystery Water, and the images are very similar in my head, about growing up. I just visited my brother in California, and he knew immediately the bumpy road was at the end of our street - my kids are singing it now. I remember reading a Van Morrison interview, where he was talking about his Astral Weeks album, and how he saw childhood as a series of small epiphanies. I think that is true, but they all sit in your head in different ways. Castle Island sounds like a gangster-type tale, Connolly added, but its really about a guy trying to find work. Its a view of my dad, returning as a Marine whod fought in Korea, and what he had to deal with to find work, and eventually enable us to get out of Dorchester and down to Marshfield. I think it deals with the fact that there are different ways of being a hero. Three of the songs

on Connollys album deal with relationships, but in the measured, mature way as youd expect of a fortysomething songsmith. Do Me is a passionate plea to take a chance on something new, just to take a step forward. When You Fall in Love ends that phrase with witty, genuine and wise reflections on the subject - feeling like a goosebump, acting like a fool, is one of the more humorous sequences, before the provocative ending When you Fall in Love, you get discovered. Right Through Me might be the most visceral rocker on this acoustic album, a celebration of the kind of incandescent, electrifying love that sustains you through everything; Life is a little dance/ We got a perfect chance/ You are the one showing it to me. And like Springsteen, Mellencamp, Alvin and Earle, the best part of Connollys music is that he makes you feel like such things are still possible. Connollys album is available at kevinconnolly.com. Digital downloads are available on iTunes.

HERE AND THERE: This Sunday afternoon the Boston Blues Society hosts a fund-raiser at Club 58 in Quincy for 2005 Battle of the Boston Blues Band winners The Chris Fitz Band to finance their trip to the nationals in Memphis in January. Appearing will be The Chris Fitz Band, Mission of Blues, Racky Thomas and Rick Russell, among others, and the 4 p.m. show comes with just a \$10 ticket. The Grace Potter and the Nocturnals show was nearly sold out at The Narrows Center last Saturday, and the talented Vermont blues-rocker had some news: her band will be doing its first headlining gig at Bostons Paradise Rock Club on Feb. 18. Theyre also opening for Assembly of Dust on Dec. 30 at the Dirty Linen Magazine

Kevin Connolly :A Detailed Life by Sheila Daughtry The gravelly, weatherbeaten voice of Kevin Connolly gives life to vivid vignettes sculpted from painstaking realism. In fine details, he carves out slices of his youth, his life in New England and abroad, and musings on his present. I like details, he admitted. Little details, very common sorts of things. Using real names for things has almost a magical resonance to me. Connollys 1995 release, Little Town [Eastern Front EFR 106], evokes the freedom of youth and the maturity of a contented married man. Fishing, football, and the Friday night dances of memory mingle with life on the road and its attendant longing for home. Dancing in the Kitchen celebrates domestic happiness, even as Didnt Mean and Walk, Laugh, Cry movingly chronicle the hurts and hopes and joys of long-term love. Small town New England is a focal point for Connollys memory. In a litany of places and people he grew up with, he conjures the restlessness and passion of adolescence. Damons Pint, the Mexicana Ballroom, Peter Buckley and Kristen Lanzetta may seem unusual lyrics to many listeners, but to Connolly, theyre roadsigns on the map of his past. Kristen Lanzetta, he mused. I never thought of putting her name in a song but I thought, well, its an interesting

sounding name, she's a real person, and there's something interesting about the resonance of not having ever talked to her again after the age of 16 or so, and now wondering where she is. The act of invoking her name is kind of spooky to me "" and kind of cool. Little Town is an earthy, rhythmic collection of dark-tinged musings, rich ballads and a brief explosion into both soulful and deadpan comedy. And while Connolly admitted to aspiring to be a little more oblique, the lyrics are riddled with the names of places and people. Names and places and common nouns are beginning points for details, and that's where you can start the story from, he explained. The thing is embracing those so much and getting them to vibrate so much that they take on something beyond just a realistic type of detail. That suspended belief is something really cool that people do in their writing, that sense of wonder as to whether that experience was really had or not. It's a trick in a way, to be able to stretch it further and further, and really make things up. Connolly was not a teller of tall tales as a child, nor did he pal around with imaginary friends. I feel in a way I'm sort of making up for lost time in terms of creating fantasies, he said. Still, he recognizes the importance of reaching beyond his own history when writing songs. Like could I ever write a cheating song, from my perspective as a very happily married person? he asked. I like to say, yeah, I'd like to be able to put myself in the shoes of that person, or that situation. Or could I write another song from the perspective of a woman? This all sounds like writing exercises after a while, but if you can you do that and pull it off, and not make it look like so much of an exercise, but something you actually connect with, he emphasized. I just wrote a song from an old man's perspective "" told his story in various small details. Songwriting is all about telling stories, he said. But that's also limiting in itself, and it's something I'm trying to experiment with. Trying not to be so literal. Trying to write so much detail and description, it can get to the point where it gets a little too intentional, and it gets a little contrived. I try to write some songs like that and some songs that don't make sense, and some songs that are more whimsical, and not try to get caught too much in any one style or format. Just because it gets limiting and ultimately, kind of boring. It's not surprising that Connolly studied literature in school. In lieu of finding anything else that I could be motivated about, he chuckled. I started out trying to be very practical about majors and so forth, but I flunked an economics course, and couldn't get a handle on engineering, so I ended up being an English major. His songwriting has matured as he has. Up until about three or four years ago, he reflected, I was writing such personal songs, not having any distance. Three or four years ago I was not as secure a person as I am now, probably more depressed and more self-centered and

hung up on stuff. Its not less personal now, its just less painful, he said. If you dive into the songwriting thing and youre writing really, deeply personal stuff, its just uncomfortable sometimes for people to hear that. Because its too emotional. I think I found a bit of a balance, in terms of talking about stuff thats personal. Because thats life, and music is an expression of heart. And you have to be honest about where youre at. If youre in a hole, I think its hard for other people to follow you down there. When youre younger, too, youre more into self-pity without really realizing it. When you get a little bit older, you realize that people dont want to listen to you whine anymore. Though hes gradually moving away from straight autobiography, Connolly does have a wealth of experiences to draw from. In 1969, when he was nine years old, his family joined the Peace Corps. We were only the seventh family that they allowed into the Peace Corps, he said, and I dont think they allowed families after us, he laughed. It might be more than just coincidence. Both my parents were schoolteachers. I guess thats an introduction to saying that were liberals, he chuckled. I think they were at a point where they were disgruntled with the States, and what was happening in the country. They felt frustrated by what was going on in Vietnam, what was going on with Nixon. And they wanted to do something about it. Thank God they didnt send us to where my father wanted to go, which was Sudan. Instead we were sent to the eastern Caribbean. Connollys parents taught school in Barbados, and so that he wouldnt lose any educational ground, the Peace Corps footed the bill for young Connolly to attend an English-style prep school. It was like a Charles Dickens novel, he said, with obligatory boxing matches every afternoon. A chauffeur drove him to and from the school, dropping him off in the working-class neighborhood where he ran around barefoot with his friends, climbing mango trees and playing with slingshots. It was a bizarre enough two-year period to remember it all quite vividly. Coming back to the States wasnt easy. I had to assimilate back into American culture. My hair was really long, I had these beads. I had black eyebrows, hair bleached blonde from the sun, and a Caribbean accent. I said mon at the end of every sentence. I didnt know how to play baseball, I knew how to play soccer. My first year back, was just embarrassing because I looked like a Beach Boy and I had been trained to stand up at school every time I said anything or I would get whacked. He did eventually settle back into his old life, graduating from school and joining an advertising agency in Chicago in an attempt to justify all that college tuition. He worked on a Frosted Flakes campaign, but still hadnt written any songs. When I graduated from college, he said, I didnt know what I wanted to do. I had always done music through college. I had a couple bands, I had a little music company where Id go out and DJ parties.

I was in a gospel choir. But I hadn't written anything. I secretly wanted to pursue it full-time, but I didn't have the guts. While in Chicago, Connolly finally started writing songs and playing out, both in little neighborhood clubs and also as a volunteer in the Joliet State Prison band. When asked what kind of band it was, Connolly just laughed, A big, mean band. He played a lot of Santana and Stevie Wonder. I bought a little four-track and started writing songs. I was not happy in advertising, there was just too much backslapping for me. I wasn't real cut out for the politicking. I didn't have those corporate chops down, how to talk out of both sides of your mouth, he said. So I decided to start a band and I went back to Boston in 1986 and did side jobs until about three years ago. Waited tables, was a cab driver. I painted houses, taught English at a Catholic boys school " odd jobs here and there. Always involved with music, but definitely needing another job to support myself. Then things kind of get to a point where you say you've got to totally commit and see if you can live on what you're making. I was very politely fired from my job as a waiter, because I was touring so much. I had changed so many shifts and traded so many shifts because I was starting to travel a lot. The boss came over to me and said, We encourage you to pursue your music career full time. And full time it has been. Up until last year, Connolly was still booking himself, as well as acting as his own publicity agent and radio promotion person. The independent Eastern Front label has grown along with Connolly, and is now able to take self-promotion off his hands and give his music national distribution. His live performances are intense, the focused flow of music and energy interspersed with dry, laconic humor. Connolly's choice of cover material is as revealing as his original work: David Gray, Richard Thompson, Tom Waits. He's still searching for the lyrics to Ricky Nelson's Garden Party, planning a wry rendition of the pop song whenever he can find them. Performance involves a certain amount of relating to people, he said. I know that sounds overly simplified, but it's really important to relate to an audience. You realize as a performer that there is something built in between the stage and the people in the audience that needs to be addressed. It's different from time to time, from night to night, but there's always something there. You have to pierce that boundary. The other thing that I understand is that performance is meant to be entertaining. People go to a show and they want to be entertained. And that includes humor, that includes insight, that includes honesty and energy. So there's a shtick involved sometimes. I used to really hate it, hate having to think about the fact that a show would be a show. I would feel like Jerry Lewis " kind of show-bizzy, in a Vegas-y sort of way. But it doesn't have to be that way. It can be spontaneous as well as somewhat patterned. And I only learned that from seeing

a lot of people that I really enjoy present fun things and riffs and some things that are just introductions to songs, that are part of the act. Once you understand that part of it, you quickly try to forget it as much as possible, and just look at it as just whatever comes up, comes up. Connolly plans to keep evolving musically. Id like to keep experimenting with things and not be tied into any format or style of music, he said. Theres lots of different paths out there. The American-type themes and American-type ideas, and the musical landscape of America is so varied that I cant ever see running out of colors, things to borrow from here and from there. He accurately pegs his music as motivated by rhythm and passion and energy. The songs reflect his grounding in an array of roots music styles. I listen to the old stuff, he says. Al Green is one of my heroes, and Otis Redding. Old 50s music, Sun Records stuff and rockabilly. Country music, to a degree. Texas singer-songwriters. Old blues guys. world music. I could probably name two or three musical heroes in every category. Little Towns rich musical blend expands on the acoustic base of Connollys 1993 debut, My My My [Eastern Front EFR 103], which deals largely with the time he spent living in Italy with his wife, who is a chef. He started out teaching at an international school there, but got introductions from several American performers passing through and wound up with gigs for the rest of the year. He is disappointed with the sound of My My My, though he still performs some of the songs from the album. The record came out before we had distribution, so its not very widely distributed " which is good, especially if you dont know the songs on the record anymore. People ask for a certain song and you go, What? That happens enough already, he said. He plans for his next recording to be completely different as Little Town is from My My My. A little bigger, more present. And maybe a little bit weirder, a little more obtuse at times, he smiled, thinking of the evolution (some say devolution) of musical hero Tom Waits. You try so hard for so many years just to get people to hear you, to listen for the first time, it makes you try to be more consistent than you ordinarily would be, he said. Look at somebody like Richard Thompson, the records that he makes these days. Or even John Prine, the record hes just put out. Those represent departures, or chances. Very different sounding but very creative records. It would be nice to get to the point where you could take more chances.

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