As U2 release their 15th studio album, The Edge talks to *Pat Carty* about reworking their revered songs, how he feels about Irish begrudgery, and why he won't follow Bono by writing a memoir

KURT ISWARIENKO

'A GREAT SONG IS INDESTRUCTIBLE'

Zero to forty Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr

How do I address him? The Edge? Mr The Edge?

"Everyone calls me Edge."

The guitar-toting boffin, who is as much responsible as anyone for the astonishing success of U2 – record sales north of 150 million, more tours than Thomas Cook could have dreamt of – doesn't require much more of an introduction than that. They're resurfacing with a new album and a residency in Vegas. And that's not to mention a Disney+ special: *Bono & The Edge: A Sort of Homecoming, with Dave Letterman*. When U2 break cover, they smash it with a big hammer. By way of an explanation, The Edge wrote in a letter to select fans that "what started as an experiment quickly became a personal obsession".

"This idea that we might rerecord some songs has been knocking around for a while. Our early records were a live act trying to reach the back of the hall. These are recordings with intimacy as the new idea, but there was no expectation. We just wanted to see where experiment might take us. There have been artists who've rerecorded their work, Taylor Swift being the most recent example, but that was driven by contractual legal reasons. In our case it was an artistic project at our discretion. That's why we did it."

Although we hear The Edge's voice on several songs – "That was a musical decision more than a thematic one. Bono would say, 'I love your voice on this one, Edge, I think we should keep it'" – it's Bono's admirable pipes that were the yardstick.

"I was trying to serve the voice and the song," he continues. "As I got arrangement ideas together, Bono would start to sing and I'd know immediately if the approach was working. Certain arrangements took huge liberties; changing keys, tempos and chords. I'm drawn to minimalism, so I was looking for the simplest arrangement to support the vocal."

That letter also explained how the band had to "surrender their reverence for the original versions", but some people may, for example, hear a much-altered *With or Without You* and howl about it being perfect as it was, although they should remember that there are currently no plans to delete any previous U2 albums. It does take a few spins to get your bearings, though. More recent songs that are perhaps not as deeply ingrained in the public consciousness, such as *The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)*, fare better.

"I'm sure there will be people who feel that way. Approach it like you don't know the songs. That helps!" he says with a smile. "As long as we were staying true to the essence of the song, we're happy to suffer the slings and arrows of fans who aren't as … enthusiastic. I wouldn't make direct comparisons between the recordings because they're so different, and I think some of the new arrangements are actually better. The fun was to find a song and realise it's better than you thought it was."

Bono's *Surrender* memoir has 40 chapters with song titles as headings, so which came first, the album or the book?

"That number 40 kept coming up. We have a song called *One* and we have a song called *40*…"

I admit, with embarrassment, that it hadn't occurred to me how those songs bookend the collection. The Edge gives me that look my mother uses when she's not angry just disappointed, before continuing. "Bono's decision to have the 40 chapters was a little bit of opportunism, but we're always looking for those kind of connections. It's also four ten-track albums in the collection, so that number seemed to make sense."

"I love the book," he proclaims, when I ask. "I know Bono so well and I was also there for a lot of it, so I'm probably the most sensitive to what's coming across. It wasn't always easy to read, but it's his perspective, his memory and his insights. Once I took a step back and pretended I'd no knowledge of this person or the backstory I loved it. It's very self-effacing, but when you look at the stuff that he has been at the centre of – not just U2, but all the other stuff – it's an amazing odyssey, and he has been incredibly forthright and honest."

He guffaws with mock offense at the notion of writing his own one. "I'm far too young to be thinking about that! I'm still wondering what I'm going to do when I grow up."

I ask because we don't really know The Edge the way that we "know" Bono.

"One of the most interesting aspects of our band are the totally different personalities, " he says. "I'm not a natural extrovert and have no real need to find the spotlight and reluctantly find myself in that position. We've very different roles to play."

That doesn't stop elements of his private life, such as his planning permission woes over building a compound in Malibu, entering the public domain. "It comes with the territory, you're a moving target, you've got to accept that. As long as you're true to your own values what people write about you is kind of immaterial."

> "
> Ireland's inability to celebrate our successes — I don't understand that

As admirable as Bono's work outside U2 is, the band must have howled "Christ, will you get back to the day job!" at least once or twice.

"At different times you would feel mild frustration at how stretched he was," he admits. "I think he was as or even more aware of that and worked very hard to make sure that it never had a negative impact on U2. The only times where there was a very obvious conflict was when he 'crossed the aisle' to work with certain politicians. The staunch conservative Jesse Helms was probably the best example. Bono managed to persuade him to change his position on the Aids pandemic. That cost him in terms of people's sense of who he was. It was uncomfortable for a while but you can't argue with the results."

Bono bashing, in this country in particular, is a national pastime. I'd be upset if he was my mate. The Edge laughs again before answering.

"At times I have found it upsetting, not just the fact my mate's coming in for abuse he doesn't deserve but also what it says about Ireland. That's what's upsetting, this inability to celebrate our successes. I don't understand that…" Begrudgery? "I don't know. It's just part and parcel of Ireland. It's probably a throwback to an era where success was intertwined with collaboration with the colonial power. To answer your question, yeah, it's annoying but there's huge benefits to our deep connection with our homeland. Again, it comes with the territory."

I suspect he's only being half-serious. We decide we're probably not the best men to put the national psyche on the couch and return to the music. Listening to *Songs of Surrender*, you're reminded of just how many marvellous tunes U2 have been responsible for, but are they able to stand back and say, 'Jaysus, we've written some great songs'?"

"It's always hard to be objective about your own work, but over the years it's hard to deny what a great song is and what a song that's an also-ran is. I don't think it's that much of an argument. There's something empirical about tunes and songs."

There was a quote from Bob Dylan a long time ago where Bono had told him that his songs would live for ever and he replied: "So will yours, but nobody will be able to play them!" These new arrangements put the lie to that.

"He actually said that to me," The Edge exclaims, putting me straight. "I think Bob was being complimentary to the fact that our style of playing was so different to what people were used to. People were baffled by what we were doing, particularly on the guitar front. What we've discovered through this process is that a great song is kind of indestructible and allows different approaches and arrangement styles, but it still retains its essence. That was something we figured out pretty early on with this project, that we didn't need to be so concerned with taking it too far. The songs could deal with it."

Bono said in The New York Times that the band had "almost finished this album called *Songs of Ascent*, which we're not putting out." He then spoke of an "unreasonable guitar album" that was on the way first.

"These are all ongoing, creative projects and just to reassure you, or anyone reading this, U2 are still extremely creative, vital, and working on a lot of new stuff."

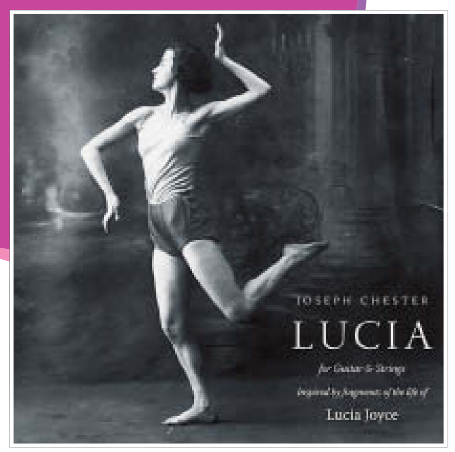
He says that, but some unkind critics might argue that rerecording old songs points to creative stagnation. The Edge isn't having it. He smiles again before answering, probably relieved he can get back to whatever he was doing before I started pulling at his sleeve.

"Nah," he answers succinctly and, in U2's case at least, quite correctly.

Songs of Surrender is released on Friday

DIVE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER

The tragic life of Lucia Joyce fascinated Joseph Chester – and inspired an album. The music is a beautiful meditation on pain and heartbreak, says *Pat Carty*



JULIE BIENVENU

Described by Hot Press magazine as "a legitimate giant of Irish music", Joseph Chester has released seven albums under his own name, produced scores of albums for other artists, and lent his guitar playing to the Waterboys, Gemma Hayes, Sinéad O'Connor and the particularly brilliant *The D They Put Between the R & L* album by the Dublin band A Lazarus Soul. After releasing *Jupiter's Wife* in 2020, he went looking for a new challenge.

"I'd never played classical guitar before the pandemic," he tells me over a cup of coffee. "I didn't know how to read or write music. I bought a method book and I started on page one."

Like a lot of us in that year, he had a bit of time on his hands.

"I don't think I would have done it if I hadn't had that time, but, like a lot of self-taught people, I'm impatient. I started goofing around with arranging Irish traditional music for classical guitar. Steve Cooney is one of my heroes and that led me to Turlough O'Carolan."

Chester released his take on the harper and composer O'Carolan's *Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór*, a version of which appears on the first Planxty album, alongside an arrangement of John Cage's *Dream* in 2021 as Carolan/Cage. While working on that, and coming to grips with the physical challenges of this new approach to guitar playing, he heard Deirdre Mulrooney's documentary on Lyric FM, *Dancing with Lucia*, which turned his head again.

"I've been reading Joyce since I was a teenager but I wasn't aware of Lucia Joyce, possibly because there was a massive campaign by certain members of her family to hide everything about her. The story really hit me on a gut level and one thing that fascinated me was the link between supposed mental illness and creativity. I've had a psychologist tell me that part of being an artist is being more sensitive; things that most people can brush off affect you more deeply."

Lucia, the only daughter of James and Nora Joyce, trained as a professional dancer in her youth before abruptly packing it in. Exhibiting signs of mental illness in her mid-twenties, she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, eventually committed, and spent the last three decades of her life in the reportedly hellish St Andrew's Hospital in Northampton, where she died in 1982.

"Carl Jung's statement about her was so true," Chester says. "He said that Lucia and James Joyce were in the same river but Joyce dived to the bottom and Lucia drowned, which basically means that she had the same creative gene or spark, but she couldn't handle it."

After Lucia's death, her nephew Stephen, a fierce protector of the Joyce estate, had all her letters destroyed.

"I think there was a lot of shame around it," Chester reckons. "James Joyce was really the only one in her corner. He refused to believe she was mentally ill. He thought she was physically manifesting the book, *Finnegans Wake*, that he was writing and that when he finished it she'd be all right. When he died she lost that champion because Nora and Lucia famously fought like devils."

Rather than speculate – although I certainly threw plenty of wild theories across the table at him, all of which Chester politely and deftly deflected – he decided to compose a suite of music for guitar and strings based on verifiable facts about Lucia's life. The resultant album, a beautiful piece of work, influenced according to the man himself by Debussy, Satie, and Toru Takemitsu, opens with *Northampton*.

"I found a photograph taken in her old age, with a haunted look on her face. I thought that would be a good place to start, to have her thinking back on her short life before she was incarcerated."

The Little Match Girl, *La Princess Primitive* and *The Jury's Verdict* all refer to Lucia's promising dancing career. Her talent led the Paris Times to predict that "when she reaches her full capacity for rhythmic dancing, James Joyce may yet be known as his daughter's father".

"She worked with Jean Renoir, a master of silent cinema. She studied with Isadora Duncan's brother. She was obviously very talented and came second in an international competition [Paris, 1929] with the audience chanting '*L'Irlandais*!'"

Chester is of the opinion that at least part of the reason why she gave it all up was family pressure.

"Nora was a conservative Galway girl, she wasn't happy about it, and there were constant arguments in the house. Joyce was trying to write *Finnegans Wake*, he was likely thinking, 'I can't work like this,' so something had to give. John Banville called Joyce a cannibal and I think he's right."

While all this was going on, Lucia had a brief physical relationship with Samuel Beckett, but he broke her heart by eventually declaring that his only interest was in her father and his work.

"It's like that Bob Dylan line, you can't be wise and in love," Chester says in his defence. "We're talking about two 20-year-old kids so we shouldn't be too harsh. People who visited Lucia later in her life said that the first person she would ask about was Beckett. I think she loved him until she died even though it was a brief affair."

He also contributed to her upkeep at St Andrews later on.

"He did, yeah. And when he died they found a picture of Lucia in her fish costume in his desk. Joyce had banned him from the house because of what he'd said to Lucia. He was persona non grata until Joyce realised he needed a French translator, so then Beckett was working in the house every day, which must have been torture for her."

The title of *What's He Doing Under the Ground, That Idiot?*, an especially moving piece featuring violin and cello, comes from Lucia's response to her father's passing.

"When she was told her father died in 1941, that's what she said. 'When is he going to come out? He's watching us all the time.' I just felt that was heartbreaking."

Chester's Lucia conveys that heartbreak, managing "to tell a story with no words", but it is also a stand-alone work of art, to use Joyce's own words, "so beautiful and sad" that it speaks to every "soul's incurable loneliness".

A full performance is scheduled in April in Axis, Dublin. The album is available from joechester.bandcamp.com

Re: Joyce
Joseph Chester's album is inspired by Nora Joyce

> "What fascinated me was the link between supposed mental illness and creativity

LAURA SAN SEGUNDO FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES; MAURICE GUNNING

CAHILL ADDED ANOTHER STRING TO MY BOW

Master fiddler Martin Hayes tells *Pat Carty* why the passing of the Gloaming guitarist Dennis Cahill is such a loss

When Dennis Cahill passed away in 2022 after a lengthy illness, the guitarist's friend, collaborator and fellow maestro Martin Hayes wrote an open letter to him as a way of "trying to process something".

It prompted the producer Dónal O'Connor to put together a documentary for TG4 called, appropriately enough, *Dennis Cahill: Litir ó do Chara*.

It's a touching account of both the musician and the man, with contributions from friends and family, and amusing reminiscences of Cahill going jogging in rural Clare despite his fear of livestock – hardly surprising for a man raised in Chicago, where bulls are more likely to be spotted only on a basketball court. It is, however, Cahill's contribution to traditional Irish music that I am most keen to ask Hayes about. The fiddler has previously referred to his old bandmate as a minimalist.

"Earlier on in our careers, we'd be playing these gigs, Dennis might just play an occasional note," Hayes says over Zoom from his home in Spain. "Or maybe two notes, not even a chord, and people would go, 'What the hell is that?' He wasn't exclusively a minimalist but if I was playing something in G minor, he would play the notes that I wasn't already playing. He edited out unnecessary duplication down to the essential core of what he wanted to create."

> He'd play the notes I wasn't already playing — he edited down to the core

None of this happened by accident.

"He was a very conscious and thought-out player. He wasn't one to jam, he was methodical. I operated by a different set of rules," Hayes says, smiling. "I was like, let's play and see what happens – I'll figure it out on the night. The two approaches complemented each other: spontaneity and discipline."

Cahill studied for a degree in classical guitar but abandoned it to concentrate on gigging, playing everything from jazz to rock to country. "He just had this broad sense through different experiences of music," Hayes says. "He would go from Segovia to Chet Atkins to Bill Frisell."

The mention of the jazz guitarist Frisell reminds me of a quote by Iarla Ó Lionáird, the sean-nós merchant who sang with Hayes and Cahill in the Gloaming, who says in the documentary that Dennis "wanted every note to be magical".

"Yeah, it wasn't the amount of notes you played or the speed, it was the appropriateness of the choice and how refined, specific and clear that choice was. Frisell has that where he might be playing something you might think is very basic, but then there's this twist and you wonder how he even thought of it. He's telling you, 'I've done something very simple, but don't worry, there's a complexity to my thinking as well.'"

You need to know the rules inside and out to be able to break them like that.

"Pretty much," Hayes agrees. "Dennis had this theory about traditional music, that you could apply universal musical principles to it, the same ones that Bach, Beethoven, Bill Evans or Miles Davis used, that are applicable no matter what you're playing. Irish music is mostly based on melody but so is jazz, so how do they deal with it? It's open. You can break those rules in traditional music, as long as you know what cannot and should not be broken."

Steve Cooney, another great trad guitar player, said Cahill "created his own harmonic language".

"There are more standard approaches, almost agreed-upon principles," Hayes says. "Dennis came in like none of those existed at all. He rebuilt the wheel. He felt he was behind the curve but I argued that he had all this other musical knowledge which he could apply and do his own thing, which he did. He had a beautiful way of colouring the music with chording designed specifically for each individual and unique melody."

Ó Lionáird points out in the documentary that Cahill was "able to do more with less".

"For the musician, the ask is to distil it to its most essential point," Hayes agrees. "Doing something that might look easy and create something that's beautiful and maybe get no credit for it – the world might not go, 'Wow, he's an amazing guitarist,' because he wasn't playing a million notes a minute."

That's something you can hear in the best music across many genres. U2's the Edge offers another good example.

"It's quite similar – he doesn't get the credit either," Hayes says. "This attitude that anyone could do it. 'God, it's very easy.' Well, how come I never heard anyone else doing it? I'll tell you why, because it's not that easy. I was reading about *shibusa*, this Japanese aesthetic philosophy which is about complexity of thought, effort and process to produce the simple. It's about producing an outcome that contains none of the complexity required to make it."

If Hayes is pushed to illustrate Cahill's *shibui* approach, he points to the first two albums they recorded together: *The Lonesome Touch* in 1997, and *Live in Seattle* two years later.

"Both those records capture the essence of what Dennis did musically."

Listeners will note the stretching-out on that live record – there's not much change out of half an hour on one of the medleys – and a repetition of the melodic lines that is an almost jazz-like approach, to get to that essence.

"You keep playing until you forget yourself," is how the master puts it. "You let go and lose yourself and you reach a freedom. You want to keep going so you don't have to restart that process. That heightened experience is a magical thing. You have this glimpse of openness and greatness, flow and magic, and ease. You're in another place."

Martin Hayes collaborated with Dennis Cahill, left, numerous times since the 1980s, including in the trad supergroup the Gloaming

> You can break the rules of trad, if you know what can be broken

That approach is veined like a seam of precious metal throughout their art, including the great success of the Gloaming, whose nights in Dublin's National Concert Hall veered towards the supernatural.

"It's great to be successful but that would be nothing to you if the music itself wasn't bringing you something. The music makes the whole thing worth it and it would be an empty life without it," said Hayes, who is performing with the Common Ground Ensemble in the NCH on March 26 to mark the release of their debut album, *Peggy's Dream*.

Referring back to a line from that letter in which he stated, with considerable accuracy, that he and Cahill made a difference, Hayes concludes: "Against the odds, in a sense, something did come of it. We opened up a certain pathway within the music and, on many of the nights that we played, we made a bit of magic for people."

Dennis Cahill: Litir ó do Chara is on TG4 at 9.30pm on Sunday, March 5

I've had couples spending £250,000 ask: How about a cash bar?

As an excruciating lawsuit lifts the lid on Brooklyn Beckham and Nicola Peltz's big day, wedding planners reveal to *Simon Usborne* the diva demands of their super-rich clients

The most demanding bride Mark Niemierko is allowed even to refer to, given how often he is compelled by his wealthy clients to sign non-disclosure agreements, was also one of the rudest people he has ever met.

"She was a nightmare!" says Niemierko, who plans no more than five weddings a year with an average budget of £250,000 (they can cost as much as £2.5 million). "She was so rude to me, and when she called another supplier a stupid bitch, I called her out."

The woman's response to Niemierko's gentle reproach perhaps reveals a lot about the increasingly high-stakes, high-drama world of the ridiculously expensive wedding. "She said to me: 'Well, I'm a bride! I'm allowed to be like this!'"

Posh planners were in a frenzy last week after a legal battle in Florida threw open the marquee flaps of the high-end wedding industry to reveal the mores and demands of one-percenters heading to the altar.

According to court papers, the planning of Brooklyn Beckham's £3 million wedding last year to the American heiress Nicola Peltz was, to use a phrase allegedly deployed by the father of the bride, a "shit show".

Nelson Peltz, a billionaire New York food tycoon, sued his daughter's wedding planners, Nicole Braghin and Arianna Grijalba, claiming they had made "mistakes" and demanding the return of a $159,000 (£133,000) deposit.

Earlier this month, Braghin and Grijalba hit back with a counterclaim for damages, calling Peltz Sr a "billionaire bully".

The pair, who were sacked after just nine days on the job, said they had walked into a nightmare of conflicting guest lists, strained communications and a last-minute complaint that a bouquet of peonies was "not white enough".

The planners also claim Nicola Peltz objected to their attempts to consult the groom about the guest list. "I do not trust Brooklyn with this," she texted. "U should be asking an assistant. He has no idea. And is guessing."

A spokesman for the Peltz family said last weekend their complaint was "replete with inaccuracies and their claims have no merit".

While that case rumbles on in Florida, the elite UK wedding planners to the ultra-rich agreed to share some of the secrets of an exclusive trade.

Niemierko, a former television producer from Essex, whose clients have included James Corden, says tensions peaked last year as pent-up, post-pandemic demand clashed with a supply-chain crisis.

"The whole industry was a mess," he says, revealing that he had to part ways with one of his own clients. Sadly, he doesn't elaborate.

Couples are becoming ever more exacting and controlling about their perfect day,

Brooklyn Beckham and Nicola Peltz: the bride's billionaire father, Nelson, is suing the wedding planners for $159,000

which must draw on and feed Instagram ideals that make society weddings of yore look like village fêtes.

"In the past it was the mother of the bride who organised the wedding. Now it's the couple in the driving seat," says Charlotte Aitken, co-founder of Albion Parties, who knows a thing or two about wedding traditions: she is the daughter of the third Baron Beaverbrook and the ex-wife of a duke.

WhatsApp, meanwhile, is a quick-fire battlefield of simmering resentments and interference. "When some cousin suddenly appeared in one planning group, I added a line in my contracts to say I'll only take orders from the bride or groom," Niemierko says.

Security paranoia can also complicate affairs. In one message revealed in the Beckham-Peltz files, Brooklyn asks if the security team could "get those guns that shoots a net because there's probably gonna be drones [launched by the media]".

Instagram poses a more mundane risk. "We had someone last year who put an embargo on anyone Instagramming from the church," Aitken says. "Weddings are almost being live-streamed now."

And even billionaires get agitated about bills. The Beckham planners allege that Nicola's mother begged them not to tell Peltz Sr that it cost $100,000 for their daughter's hair and make-up alone.

"I've had people sit opposite me who are spending £250,000 on a wedding, and they're saying, 'Shall we have a cash bar?'" says Niemierko. "And I'm like, 'What?' There is nothing more crass than asking people to put their hands in their pockets at a wedding."

High-profile brides feel the pressure to look their best even more keenly. Johnny Roxburgh, the veteran "party architect" who organised Prince William's 21st birthday bash, recalls a client whose wedding diet was so successful her strapless gown fell to her waist as she stepped into the church.

"I grabbed her and said, 'Don't worry, I'm gay', and popped her tits back in," he says. Other last-minute crises for Roxburgh, who once worked with a £50 million budget, included a sandstorm that swept away part of a desert wedding for 800 people in the Middle East.

Planners must also wrangle star-studded guest lists. Nicola Peltz allegedly became agitated over whether or not Lewis Hamilton had RSVPd and insisted the Florida governor Ron DeSantis should not be invited. "Desantis must be OFF THE GUEST LIST. PLEASE CONFIRM!" she texted the planners.

Then there's the A-list entertainment to deal with. Niemierko was recently stunned to receive a list of dressing-room demands from an up-and-coming pop act that had a 20-minute spot at one of his weddings.

> I'm a bride! I'm allowed to be like this

The exhaustive "rider" included a jar of manuka honey, a large piece of fresh ginger, 30 towels, and dozens of bags of "posh crisps (not Walkers)". "I'd never even heard of this person!" Niemierko says. "It was so ridiculous, I framed it and put it in the office loo."

Geoff Sewell, a singer and co-founder of Incognito Artists, which organises performances at high-end parties – he recently booked Andrea Bocelli for a wedding anniversary – says it can be a challenge just holding the attention of elite guests.

Sewell's own group once performed at a huge London wedding alongside Robbie Williams, Kylie Minogue and Pink. "A lot of the guests had seen it all before, and when Pink gets on stage they're just talking through it," he says.

Niemierko says the whole point of being able to throw huge money at a wedding should be to take the stress away. "When you're paying half a million quid, anything can be sorted," he says. "Just relax a bit and focus on making sure your eyelashes don't fall off."