



# IN HIS GOLDEN YEARS

At 65, Johnny Logan is marking the 40th anniversary of his first Eurovision triumph — and says the influence of his father is still as powerful as ever, writes *Pavel Barter*

4 12 January 2020

on the same planet, as far as our music was concerned. He was this credible guy who was living the rock'n'roll life. But we did meet in nightclubs. I was a heavy drinker, so we gravitated towards each other."

Eventually he finds what he is looking for: unreleased recordings of Irish standards that he made with a philharmonic orchestra in Leipzig some years ago. "I've always wanted to make an album of songs my dad sang," he says. Logan's passionate rendition of Danny Boy soars from the phone. "I can hear his voice," he says, looking at me through teary eyes. "That's my father's voice, not mine."

The Irish singer is facing an intense itinerary over the coming year, with shows booked in Germany, Holland, Belgium and Scandinavia. "This is nothing," he insists. "I'm actually pulling back this year." Winning the Eurovision Song Contest for a second time in 1987, with *Hold Me Now*, was a gift that keeps on giving. He is as "big" on the Continent as ever.

Travelling is the only life he has known. His father, the Irish tenor Patrick O'Hagan, toured the world when Logan was a child, singing for three successive American presidents along the way. Logan describes himself as a tour baby, because he was born in Australia — a pit stop on his father's itinerary.

Ireland is where he lives and where his heart remains, of course. The singer's 2020 schedule includes a gig at Vicar Street in April. His homecoming shows are landmark events, attended by a fervent following from Ireland and across Europe. This show will mark 40 years since he first won Eurovision, with *What's Another Year* — which gives him cause for reflection.

"In November 2017 I lost my little brother to a heart attack," he says. "We took his ashes and said goodbye to him at Howth, near Ireland's Eye. That was my first home; the first place we lived for more than five or six years. Our childhood was spent in Howth — it was where we were happiest as a family."

His father died in 1993, but O'Hagan's presence still weighs heavily on the singer. In his early teens, Logan accompanied his father on a tour of Australia. O'Hagan had arthritis and was unable to lift his arms, so for three months his son helped him dress and watched him perform. "I think my dad maybe saw a lot of himself in me. He felt that I was directionless. I spent my life feeling that I hadn't been close enough to, or didn't spend enough time with, my dad."

O'Hagan's death affected his son terribly. "You never get over losing somebody like that; you learn to live with it. Sometimes it can take this" — he clicks his fingers — "and you're back there again. You're that little boy."

The 40th anniversary has given

**Another era** Logan, left, and, below, winning Eurovision in Holland in 1980

Logan cause to look back on his career in the music industry. "How it exists today, as opposed to the industry I came into back in the late 1970s ... they are different beasts," he says.

One of his first leaps was to adapt a stage name — and Roberto Danova, Joe Dolan's producer, found it for him. At the time he was gigging as Seán O'Hagan, adopting his father's pseudonym, while working as an electrician during the day.

"After I won the first Eurovision, it allowed me to be two different people: Johnny did the TV shows and went on stages in front of thousands of people; Seán was the father, the apprentice electrician, down-to-earth and gentle," he says.

Logan still considers winning the Eurovision in 1980 a poisoned chalice. Managers and record labels began fighting over him, leading to legal battles that lasted for years and stalled his career. "I was 25. I wasn't able for it, to be honest. I was trying to deal with everything and pretend it didn't get on top of me, but it was all over me."

The stress was compounded by negative media reports and press intrusion. "I had people appearing at the door of my house while I was away," he recalls. "I would consider myself a slow developer from a publicity point of view. It's left me with an awful feeling. I've refused to do interviews for a long time, especially tabloid interviews."

When he felt directionless in the mid-1980s, songwriting saved him. *Hold Me Now* was only the second song he wrote, but it transformed his life. The single went to No 2 in the UK charts and sold 6m copies. Once established as a writer, he penned another Eurovision winner, *Why Me?*, for Linda Martin in 1992.

"The second win gave me credibility as a writer," he says. "It separated me from the pack. I bought my house out of the first royalty cheque. Shay Healy [who wrote *What's Another Year*] told me, 'Seán, you went through all this shit for seven years

and it never affected you.' The reality was, it had affected me. I was crying for no reason; I would make decisions based on anger."

Fifteen years ago, Logan stopped drinking and attended counselling. "Different things had affected me much more deeply than I knew, and they came out during this period. Drink is something we use to cover things instead of dealing with them. But there is always a point where you realise, especially as you get older, that it doesn't work any more."

Once Logan banished his demons, his career surged further. In 2007, he released *The Irish Connection*, an album of standards that needed to sell 12,000 CDs to cover costs. It sold more than 200,000, knocking Coldplay off the No 1 position in Norway and making the singer a star across Scandinavia all over again.

This validation helped him abandon any lingering anger about his treatment by the music industry during the 1980s. Resentment, he realised, is a useless emotion. "It's not doing anybody any good: me, my family, or the people around me. I can't forget what happened, but I could let go of it."

It Is What It Is, his last album, released in 2017, was a personal statement of intent: a sign of a rebuilt, reinvigorated recording artist. "I tried so hard for years to be what people wanted me to be. My career stayed on the same level. When I stopped doing that, and became myself, my career came up to here," he says, pointing at the ceiling.

In tandem, the line between Sherrard and Logan evaporated. In 2012 he toured Sweden, where he regaled the audience between songs with stories about his parents. "Personal and honest stories. I found that the audience reacted to me, not to somebody I was trying to be. I've learnt that Seán and Johnny is one person. Without intellectualising it, the person on stage now is much more like Seán."

Listening to his heartfelt, operatic voice on *Danny Boy*, I realise he has also become more like his father. Logan connects with him every night on tour, through the song *Dancing with My Father* — a tribute from his 2008 album *Irishman in America*. "I love my father just as much now as I did when he was breathing," he says. "I can still feel him near me and that gives me strength." ■

*Johnny Logan and his Band, What's Another Year? 40, Vicar Street, Dublin, Apr 18 & 19; vicarstreet.com*

“  
I've learnt that Seán Sherrard and Johnny Logan is one person



12 January 2020 5