

SINGER SONGWRITER:
Malcolm Holcombe



Escape to the country

FANS of Americana are unlikely to hear anything closer to the real deal this side of the Atlantic than Malcolm Holcombe who returns to the B Bar on Sunday, to deliver songs from this eighth full-length album, *To Drink The Rain*.

On his last visit early last year, he captivated the intimate B Bar crowd with a spell-binding performance of incredible intensity, which had everyone hanging on his every note and anecdote in reverential silence.

But it's not only punters who are appreciative of this inimitable acoustic troubadour who seems to incorporate each mile travelled, each experience gleaned and each cigarette smoked into his songs.

Among many in the business, Lucinda Williams is a fan. "From the

by **CLARE ROBINSON**

Music Writer

first note I was drawn in," she said. "Malcolm is an old soul and a modern day poet, he is a rare find."

Hailing from North Carolina via many years in Nashville – where he was signed to Geffen in the mid '90s – Malcolm appears as a sort of sonic and visual cross between Neil Young, Tom Waits and JJ Cale.

"Late night I'd mess around with the radio dial," he says by way of explaining where he drew his first inspiration, "and pick up some strong signal playing Beatles or rock 'n' roll or something to wiggle your toes to. I watched pickers on TV, had a little help from my uncle who was a Baptist preacher, and practised when I wasn't out playing ball.

"Basically I was a butcher, hacking, flailing, hissing, howlin' and

messing around. My mom would tell me to stop singing through my nose!"

His unique style has served him well as his latest offering, *To Drink the Rain*, proves.

Recorded over just three days at Cedar Creed Recording in Austin with a crack band of hotshots from Texas and Nashville, the 12 tracks are authentic as live recordings that strike the perfect balance between gravel and grace.

Opening track *One Leg At A Time* – about putting your britches on, "woke up this morning" style – sets out the stall of the album with a positive, blues 'n' boogie feel-good vibe, some superb finger-picking guitar work accompanying that fabulous rugged voice.

Hopefully, Malcolm will find space in his set to include the highlight track of previous album *For The Mission Baby*. The sublime, understated

Doncha Miss That Water with its driving beat, uplifting vibe and fabulously addictive melody was a particular favourite on his last visit.

Lyrically, some of his songs are autobiographical, some gleaned from a life time on the road.

"I try to speak my mind from what I've experienced personally and what I've heard from family and friends and on my travels," he says. "There's a lot of poor people, a lot of suffering and a load of injustice."

But his vision of the world and its people is inherently optimistic.

"The way I see it," he concludes, "is that we're all a work in progress. I believe all people have good inside but some get dirty and mashed.

"And I thank the Lord for the chance to find a better pathway."

The show starts at 7pm and tickets are £10, available from www.uegotickets.com/event/100379 or on the door.