

Paint the town red when Mark Kozelek hits Galway

BY KEVIN MCGUIRE

MARK KOZELEK was born in Masillon, Ohio, in 1967. It's an area where farming and mining are the main sources of employment, but the young Kozelek felt it would be better to seek a different path in life and so he moved to nearby Atlanta in the mid 1980s.

"It was an adventure just leaving behind everything I knew and starting from scratch," Kozelek tells me. "Culturally, Atlanta is a very different place from where I grew up. There was also lot of racial weirdness there, stuff I read about in history books but never knew still existed. There are these little areas that are kind of progressive, but overall, Atlanta is a big, shiny, corporate city.

"The things that I noticed there are probably subtle or even invisible to people who have grown up there, but transparent to someone visiting. I learned a lot - you learn a lot from travelling, living in different places, whether or not they're the ideal place to be or not."

In Atlanta Kozelek met a kindred spirit in drummer Anthony Koutsos and together they formed Red House Painters before relocating to San Francisco. The line-up was completed by 1992 with Gordan Mack on guitar and Jerry Vessel on bass. For the next four years the quartet would release a number of acclaimed albums including *Down Colourful Hill*. By the end of the 1990s problems with their record label led Kozelek to pursue a number of solo projects. Kozelek is older and wiser after his experience.

"There was discouragement from time to time but it all got me to where I am now," he says. "I'm in a position now of owning my own label, my own business, which makes me happy. Being on a label - major or indie - for the most part, is

actually a degrading place to be. It took me some time to realise that. I guess it's sort of like working at coffee shops for 10 years and then realising 'f*** this, I'm going to open my own

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shop'. I'm happy to be out of that label world. It's a good place to get a start, but if you can do it yourself, it's the best way to go."

In recent years Kozelek has released new material under his own name and under the moniker of Sun Kil Moon, which he said in an interview is essentially Red House Painters under another name.

How did the name change come about? "To confuse people. I don't know - I just needed a change." Can he see himself releasing another Red House Painters' album in the future? "Yes" he says "but it won't be called Red House Painters."

In the movies

In recent years Kozelek has also busied himself by appearing in a number of movies including *Almost Famous*, *Vanilla Sky*, and *Shopgirl*. He describes the experience of the Cameron Crowe directed *Almost Famous* as "a lot of fun, no work at all".

"The hardest part was getting up at 4am for the early calls," Kozelek says. "Billy Crudup worked hard, Cameron worked, the grips worked. But as for me, I was kind of on vacation in a surreal, bubble-like world. It was fun to do that with Cameron and the other actors for seven months. I have great memories of it all, but I couldn't do that

forever. I got an offer to audition to be one of the band dudes in *Rock Star* right after *Almost Famous* but I turned it down. Being Larry Fellows was a blast, but a once in a lifetime thing. I made some nice friends down there. That has been the best part. Cameron and I are still in touch. I have a lot respect for him."

Throughout the early 1990s, Red House Painters, American Music Club, Codeine, Idaho, and Low were the leading exponents of the slowcore subgenre of alternative rock. The introspective lyrics and minor-key melodies owed as much to Joy Division as they did to Nick Drake and Sandy Denny. So will Kozelek be going to see the Joy Division/Ian Curtis movie *Control* when it comes out?

"Probably, but I'm not in a hurry," he

says. "It's the obvious movie for hipsters to be excited about at the moment. It's got all the hype that all the other movies had: director is a fan, all the right people are involved, this one is the real deal, etc, etc. But a few years from now, it'll likely be just another hokey movie on the shelf like *Sid and Nancy* or the ones about Jim Morrison, Edie Sedgwick, or whoever. It's kind of amusing, watching someone trying to sum up something so complex into a two hour movie. I love the albums, the

music, the mystique, but I just don't feel the need to have it all explained to me by hanger-ons or people who 'were there'. Suicide is such a personal, private, delicate subject."

Red House Painters have been a significant influence upon current bands like Coldplay, Keane, Snow Patrol, and Plain White T's "I've only heard of a few of these bands. I've heard the guy from Snow Patrol [Gary Lightbody] is a fan," says Kozelek.

Kozelek, Sun Kil Moon, and Red House Painters have always had a captive audience in Ireland and Mark Kozelek is looking forward to the prospect of playing here.

"There are always nice audiences there," he says. "I'm not just saying that - I'd tell you if they weren't - but one thing is that the crowds there are always respectful. I'll travel a long way for something like that."

Mark Kozelek plays a solo show at Róisín Dubh on Saturday November 3 as part of a nationwide tour. Tickets are available from the Róisín Dubh, Zhivago, and Redlight Records.

Mark Kozelek. Pic:- Nyree Watts