

Tim Flannery — Great Celtic Bluegrass Sounds
A Music Review by Harry (doc) Babad

It's not often that I feel tempted to do music CD reviews, since I have little experience in reviewing music and an even more limited vocabulary of music genre terms. However, after receiving my first Tim Flannery album as part of a Rediscover Music grab bag, I was hooked. [<http://www.rediscovermusic.com/>, 800-232-7328.]

Tim Flannery, with plenty of help from his friends, brings his Irish Kentucky-bred songs most of which reflect his Kentucky, Irish and Native American roots. How does he do it — Besides a lot of practice, "you surround yourself with the best bluegrass pickers on the planet," Tim said.

After sharing my joy in his music with Tim, I asked to be allowed to review three of his currently available albums *Pieces of the Past* (1999), *Highways Song* (2002) and *Kentucky Towns* (2004.)

Much of this review is abstracted from reviews on Tim's website and are used with his permission. For this article, I've not only searched Tim's site but also the wider world of Google. The result is a cornucopia of tidbits, a collage of verbal images, which I hope will lead to you listen in to the songs and playing of Tim Flannery and his accomplished friends. I know those of you who receive the 3RFS eTalk are internet savvy and I urge you to get online, check out the albums and play the tracks offered there. You're in for a great experience—meanwhile, I keep going back and playing my three Flannery albums and waiting to virtuously before I let my packrat (e.g., collector) instincts force me to getting his latest album *Ring Around the Sun*.

As I mentioned to Tim when we last traded emails, I would be great if he could reissue the now out of print *Friends*, *Secret World*, and *Looking Back* all of which were released as 1000 CD runs. His fans would love it!

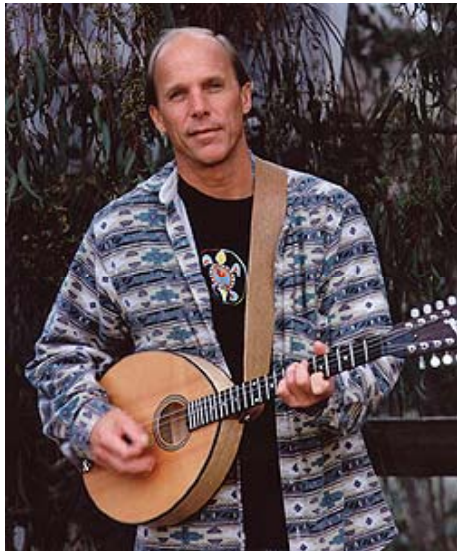
Tim, I always find it frustrating when albums by folks whose music I get of on go out of print. If you like the tracks on presently unavailable CDs let Tim know via his website.

As a post-script, if any of you readers find a great album you'd like to share with us, write a review and send it by mail to hbabad@owt.com. This space can be yours next month.

[Tim's website is:
<http://timflannery.com/www.timflannery.com/index.html>]

For all of you 3RFS folk music, Celtic and Bluegrass enthusiasts, here's my introduction to Tim Flannery his music and life.

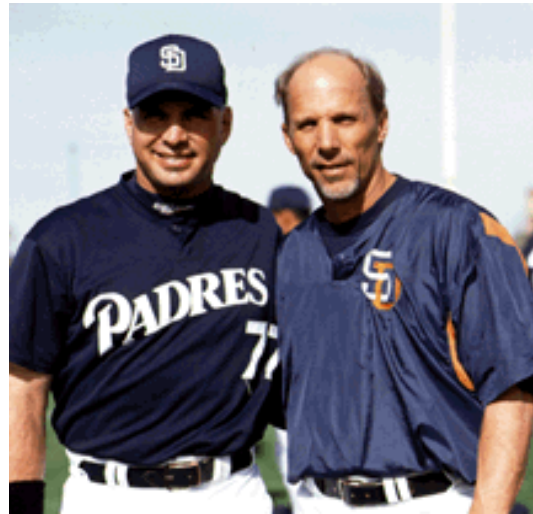
Tim's musical style is unadorned, melancholy, intelligent, with most tunes featuring an arrangement of guitar with a flourish of harmonica, mandolin, slide guitar, organ, or melodica. There's a dual theme here—Tim messages in his at time seemingly uncrafted songs and some of the finest pickin' it's been my privileged to listen to. One problem with these albums — I don't know which of their attributes reaches me the most. Tim's musicality of the word to his mostly self-written songs. So listen up, It's your call.



According to other reviews posted on the website, Tim Flannery's journey has been primarily one of balance. Between: Baseball and music; family and his team; and personal loss and love.

After two decades as a player

and a coach with the San Diego Padres, which includes two World Series and an All-Star game, Tim left the game. He now has time to pursue his musical life. The last 24 years of being on the road with baseball gave him some great material to write about, and while on the road away from his family for 200 nights a year, his music was his constant companion.



Continually returning to the music that he grew up with, every record, starting with *Looking Back* in 1995, reflects his Kentucky, Irish and Native American roots. Fans and critics alike took notice. His 1997 album, *Secret World*, as well as *Pieces of the Past* in 1999, were each nominated for the San Diego Music Awards

His 2001 release, *Highway Song* produced by Jeff Berkley, highlighted Flannery's growth as a songwriter. One reviewer said, "Flannery writes personal songs with universal themes, and does so with a skill that is the equal of the universally recognized "best"

writers around," while another noted, "Tim's songwriting and honest performance shine through on this album." I agree after listening to the three albums in sequence; I agree that "Highway Song took Flannery to new musical and personal levels."

I also wholeheartedly agree with agree with others who have discussed Tim's development as a musician, that "Tim continues to explore the range of possibilities that life, music and songwriting make possible; on his release, *Kentucky Towns*. Inspired by the discovery of his father's Bible, Flannery was thrown back to a time and place that re-connected him to his childhood. The Bible was filled with many names, dates and a vivid history of his dad's mountain ministry in Athens, Kentucky during the late 1940s. Flannery drew on the essence of that history to create a contemporary bluegrass record that honors and validates the music he grew up with. "In our house, we were raised on Bill Monroe and the Everly Brothers, so this music is what my family has always loved to play and sing."

The *Kentucky Towns* CD features a mix of originals and cover tunes, as well as some arrangements of traditional songs. Flannery's own contributions include an affirmation of faith called "Foot of the Cross" ("The price upon my head has been paid / He's waiting at the door"), *He Ain't Coming Down*

the Mountain, about his uncle Jimmy, and the title track, which uses the discovery of his dad's Bible to talk about Jesus using his father to spread the good word.

PIECES OF THE PAST — The album's background. *Pieces of the Past*, Flannery's third album is also his most personal musical journey.

The album was inspired by and is dedicated to Flannery's father, Ragon, a second-generation American of mostly Irish and some Cherokee descent who was born deep in the Kentucky Mountains. Last year, Tim returned to those mountains to immerse himself in the family gestalt. In early January of this year, two days before bringing his custom 810 to the Taylor repair shop for a new pickup, he placed his dad, an Alzheimer's sufferer, in a local nursing home. The complex emotions loosed by that gut-wrenching experience were still fresh on his face and in his voice, and they provide the underpinning for the music on *Pieces of the Past*. That music --- Tim calls it "Irish hillbilly music" --- was the soundtrack to Ragon Flannery's youth, and now is Tim's only means of reaching and connecting with his father.

According to Flannery, *Pieces of the Past* nearly didn't happen. He was close to giving up on music, he had just learned of his father's illness, he was playing uninspired cover tunes with a fragmenting band, and was feeling utterly fatigued. A

chance meeting with singer/songwriter Matt Manning, who wrote the Irish radio hit *Waltzin' an Angel* changed his direction. "I asked Matt to listen to my tape. I didn't know where these songs were coming from, but I thought there was a Celtic influence there." Manning listened, and offered to produce Flannery. Manning added whistles, fiddles, and uilleann pipes to Flannery's bare-bone songs. It was the revitalization Flannery needed. "Yes, this is what I want to do," says Flannery of his reaction to Manning's musical input.

Having grown accustomed to the technologically advanced wonders wrought by the modern recording studio, we sometimes find it easy to equate depth with textural density and power with a high decibel punch. "*Pieces of the Past* celebrates the power of deceptively simple, organic music crafted with care and love; of earthy gems allowed

to sparkle in uncluttered settings; of emotional depth limned with acoustic guitars, mandolins, fiddles, uilleann pipes, banjos, and laundry-room percussion that combine to forge a sound as unpretentious and bracing as that first breath of morning air on a Kentucky porch, or a Celtic meadow, or a California beach."

So...

Those who know me, and the Macintosh users amongst you who read my macCompanion.com articles and reviews know, I'm seldom at a loss for words — perhaps more than most folks want to hear. So, check out Tim Flannery! The last time I go so wound up in someone's music was when, no I'm not going to tell you when, I first heard the Moody Blues *Knights in White Satin* or was it Andrew Rolland Summers Elizabethan ballad "*The Seeds of Love*".



