

DUKE SPECIAL BIOGRAPHY

Duke Special is an artist aptly named. Dynamic, musically ambitious & bracingly eccentric, with his inimitable style and lush musicality. Hailing from Belfast with a sound that is self-confessed “hobo-chic”, Duke Special - AKA the endlessly inventive Peter Wilson - is once heard, never forgotten.

Blissfully at home in his own alluring genre of beautifully bruised romanticism, Duke Special inhabits a world unlike any other - a world filled with vaudeville-esque sensibility, sing-a-longs and addictive melodies. “My sound is a bit vagabondy, but pure and soulful too,” he explains.

His critically-acclaimed 2006 album ‘**Songs From The Deep Forest**’ achieved platinum status in Ireland and received plaudits across the board. His 2008 follow-up, ‘**I Never Thought This Day Would Come**’ was recorded between Wapping, London, Champaign, Illinois and Culleybackey, Northern Ireland, and was produced by long-time collaborator **Paul Pilot** and mixed by **Nick Terry**. This was a more immediate and visceral collection than its predecessor, with many moments of beauty and hope juxtaposed with a dark, brooding edge - the trademark twist of the Duke. It was an album for sleepwalkers, skeletons and gravediggers, for those who have fallen so far down they can taste the soil between their teeth.

Duke Special’s immense creative talents have seen him involved in projects as diverse as writing the theme tune for **Sesame Tree** (the Northern Ireland edition of **Sesame Street** where he also got to sing with The Muppets) to writing the music for and appearing in Deborah Warner’s critically acclaimed 2009 production of Bertolt Brecht’s **Mother Courage and Her Children** at London’s National Theatre, starring Fiona Shaw in the lead role.

It was during this production that Duke and his band went into the studio to record an album of the twelve songs from the play, which was to form part of his ambitious new project for 2010 - the release of a 3 CD box-set, **A Book, The Stage & The Silver Screen**.

Mother Courage and Her Children is The Stage

It was Fiona Shaw who brought Duke Special on board the project, having first heard the Duke in 2007, performing at ‘The Oscar Wildes’, an annual Irish film awards held in Los Angeles. The stage spectacle is based around the music and performances of Duke Special and his band, who are an integral part of the entire play. The show was seen by over 100,000 people and garnered an overwhelming collection of positive reviews, many of which singled out Duke Special and the music as a highlight of the production.

A Book refers to **Huckleberry Finn**, a 5-track mini album which is the first ever recording of an unfinished musical written by **Kurt Weill** based on the Mark Twain classic. Weill died in 1950 before he and lyricist Maxwell Anderson were able to complete the play. The recordings come with a firm seal of approval

from the Kurt Weill Foundation, who listened to the finished songs and wrote to Duke Special saying that they were delighted with the songs and that his interpretations retained the spirit of Weill.

The Silver Screen refers to the album **The Silent World of Hector Mann**, based on *The Book of Illusions* by contemporary American author **Paul Auster**. The album was recorded in Chicago by **Steve Albini** (*Nirvana, Pixies, The Stooges*) and features songs performed by Duke Special and written by many artists including **Duke Special, Neil Hannon, Matt Hales, Ed Harcourt, Thomas Truax and Paul Wilkinson**. The Duke first encountered the actor Hector Mann in Auster's *The Book of Illusions* and was intrigued by the fact that he had only ever made twelve obscure silent movies. Deciding to base his new music project on Mann's movie appearances, the Duke sent a copy of *The Book of Illusions* and one film title to a number of artist friends, asking each to write a song based on their given film title in a pre rock 'n' roll style. The results are featured on **The Silent World of Hector Mann**. When completed, Duke sent the recordings to Auster himself and received the reply: ***"He (Auster) enjoyed it immensely and was particularly thrilled by Mr. Nobody, Jockey Club, and Tango Tangle. He gives his blessing wholeheartedly to you and the project."***

When he's not busy in the recording studio, Duke is to be found out on the road bringing his inimitable live show to appreciative audiences across the world. As well as extensive tours of the UK, Ireland and Europe, live highlights of the past few years include curating and headlining his very own one-day festival, **DUKEBOX** in Custom House Square, in the heart of Belfast, hosting a night at the **Belfast Film Festival** where he performed as a puppet of himself, performing his songs accompanied by 60-piece orchestras in Dublin and Belfast, and numerous festival appearances, including Glastonbury, Latitude, Greenbelt, Electric Picnic and Oxygen. Not forgetting headline shows in New York and Washington, Dubai, and supporting the likes of Paolo Nutini in Paris, Duffy in Copenhagen and Snow Patrol in Belfast. He even found time to learn to swordfight for an on-stage showdown and piano-duel in Dublin with his long time nemesis, Neil Hannon.

Duke Special is a fervent performer who harks back to a pre-rock 'n' roll era, with dashes of Gershwin and orchestral swing, all tinged with a Northern Irish lilt and poetic lyrics that could feature in a modern-day fairytale; the perfect balance of old and new - boasting the appeal of a three-minute pop song with the incessant charm of an old-school music hall.

He is the f****ed up ringmaster of a broken down circus, the lead dancer in a forgotten ballroom of ghosts, the loudest singer in a midnight choir and the first on his knees in an old time revival tent.