

US Folk musician Richard Shindell

Finding inspiration in Argentina

BY BRIAN BYRNES
FOR THE HERALD

Richard Shindell's life is in a perennial state of motion. The singer/songwriter/guitarist had built a loyal following in the contemporary folk music world in the United States during the 1990s, but even with critical and commercial success, he found himself looking for a change. So in 2000, he and his Argentine wife moved their family from New York to Buenos Aires. In the four years since, Shindell has been crisscrossing the Americas, maintaining a rigorous touring schedule in the US, while raising two children in his adopted hometown of Buenos Aires. His desire to satisfy his familial obligations and his musical instincts has clearly influenced his songwriting, and the results can be heard on his latest release, *Fuella*.

"*Fuella* has a bunch of different connotations. It means 'to return, to be back,' and being an expatriate, the process of returning and being back is something that I have a lot of experience with," Shindell said during a recent interview at his home in Belgium.

Fuella is the first album Shindell has released since moving to Buenos Aires. The bulk of it was recorded with an all-Argentine band, Puente Celeste, at Estudios Ion and later mixed at Fito Páez's Circoabot Studio. To celebrate the record's release, Shindell will perform his first live concert ever in Argentina this Monday, December 13 at the Club del Vino in Palermo.

"People have been asking me since I moved here, 'when are you going to do a concert?'" But I didn't know the ropes here and wasn't sure how to do it. I wanted to present the record and do it in a nice place. So I finally decided to get over the hump, and do a gig here and we'll see if people like it," he says.

In addition to presenting his new songs at Monday's show,



MARCUS MASON, HERALD

US folk musician Richard Shindell: a perennial state of motion.

Shindell will also seek donations for a children's centre in Lomas de Zamora that helps feed some 100 children a day. Shindell first learned about the "Crecer con Amor" centre through a teacher at his children's school, and after visiting the site earlier this year he says he felt an immediate desire to help in the effort to renovate and expand the centre. On his recent cross-country US tour, Shindell told US audiences about the dire socioeconomic situation in Argentina and asked for their help. The response was overwhelming. Shindell collected more than eight thousand dollars, money that is being used to help build a new kitchen and provide needed supplies for the centre.

"I decided that I would take the idea to my fans in the US and tell them about the place in Lomas de

Zamora. The support was extraordinary. And it wasn't a great sacrifice for me, it was easy to do," he says.

After more than four years in Buenos Aires, Shindell has settled comfortably into his new role as an Ex-Pat father, husband and musician. But the transition wasn't always easy, especially with regards to his professional life. Shindell admits that one of the reasons he waited several years to record an album here was the difficulty he had in communicating with other musicians and navigating the nuances of *Gastellano*.

"I've always been worried that people here weren't going to get what I did simply because they didn't understand what I'm talking about. I found out that it is not true. I've also found out that some of the things that I take for granted musically are things that the

Argentines find utterly fascinating, and vice versa. Some of the country stuff, some of the finger picking stuff I play, they are fascinated by. My certain style of finger picking blues, Mississippi John Hurt kind of thing, that's a technique that they just don't do here," he says.

When Shindell finally mustered the courage to approach the locals, he aimed high; contacting the skilled musicians of Puente Celeste and asking them to join him in the studio for the primarily acoustic-recording of *Fuella*.

"They thought I was kind of crazy. You know, this guy from New York walks in and he says he wants to make a record with you," Shindell says with a laugh. "To their credit, the first thing they wanted to know was what the lyrics are about...they immediately got the vibe of what I wanted to do."

Santiago Vázquez, the percussionist for Puente Celeste, says learning Shindell's US style folk music was a challenge for the band, but the process was aided by Shindell's guiding hand and, most importantly, the timelessness of his songs.

"From the beginning I noticed he was very solid, something really classic. His songs were already classics. So that was a fantastic beginning point for working," Vázquez says. "The album came out very freshly, very nice. It doesn't seem like something with a lot of effort, it seems like something very natural."

Vázquez' words mirror those of music fans and critics alike. Shindell's previous albums have garnered almost universal critical acclaim in the US. Shindell has

WHERE & WHEN

Richard Shindell with Puente Celeste. Monday, December 13 at 9:30pm. Club del Vino, Cabrera 4737. Tickets: \$10, 20, 30. Reservations: 4833-0048.

On the web: www.richardshindell.com
www.puenteceleste.com

been called a "master of subtle narrative." He's toured with Joan Baez. *The New York Times* compared him to Springsteen. His 1998 collaboration with Dar Williams and Lucy Kaplansky in the folk super group, Cry Cry Cry, played to sold-out crowds and catapulted the trio into the pantheon of modern folk music.

On *Fuella* Shindell recruited his former band mate Kaplansky to provide backup lyrics, most notably on the haunting *Fenaria*, Shindell's take on the classic English anti-war folk tune. And while he did rely on an old friend for help on the new album, he also attempted something he'd never done before: a song in Spanish. The result, *Canción sencilla*, is, simply, a love song to his wife.

"That's my first attempt to write a song in Spanish and I'm very proud of it because I actually managed to do it. But it's a very simple song, which of course is what *Canción sencilla* means — it means "Simple Song." It's a song about not being able to write in Spanish. It's a song about not knowing your sweetheart's language, which is a big deal, because if you don't know your sweetheart's language, then a lot of you don't know about them," he says.

Love, or the loss of it, is the reason most songs are written and Shindell covers the topic well in his work. He also writes about despair and hope, themes that can be found throughout *Fuella*, especially on the song *La Gaceta de la Noche*, a tale about an Argentine stowaway trying to escape economic hardship at home and the problems he encounters in a post-9/11 United States.

The characters in Shindell's songs are often outsiders looking in. After living as something of an outsider himself for several years here in Buenos Aires, Shindell says that he can now sympathize more with his own characters. He calls *Fuella* a more autobiographical album than his previous ones, and thinks that it holds a universal appeal for anyone who has ever left their home country and set out for a distant, foreign land.

"The process of being expatriated is a sneaky one, it kind of creeps up on you. You think it's not affecting you, you think that you're not being changed, but you are, little by little. You notice it when you go back home one day and you don't feel entirely comfortable in the place you left, and that's happened to me a couple of times."