

**LAPL BLOG****Interview With an Author: Randee Dawn**

Daryl M., Librarian, West Valley Regional Branch Library, Thursday, June 26, 2025



Author Randee Dawn and her latest novel, *The Only Song Worth Singing*

Born in Virginia, raised in Maryland, Randee Dawn is now based in Brooklyn, working as an entertainment journalist. But after many years of toil and labor and not a small amount of luck, her humorous pop culture fantasy novel *Tune in Tomorrow* was published in 2022, leading to even better things. She's the co-editor of *The Law & Order: SVU Unofficial Companion*; co-edited the anthology *Across the Universe: Tales of Alternative Beatles*, and has dozens of short stories published in anthologies and magazines. She continues to toil away (and kind of likes it, you know) for *The Los Angeles Times*, *Variety* and *Today.com*, among other publications, and dreams of her next mango opportunity. Her latest novel is *The Only Song Worth Singing* and she recently talked about it with Daryl Maxwell for the LAPL Blog.

What was your inspiration for *The Only Song Worth Singing*?

I was an aspiring music journalist while also attending university in Boston when I came upon a collection of Irish fairy and folk tales that had been compiled by W.B. Yeats. (Yes, that one!) He not only included stories he'd gathered while traveling around the country's more rural areas, but also categorized the fae in a way I hadn't seen before—into areas like "Trooping Fairies" and "Solitary Fairies." One fae he named was the leanhaun sídhe (sometimes spelled leannan sídhe), or the fairy mistress. There are just a few lines in there, but essentially, she's the muse who steals your life away as she inspires you to write and create great works. I asked the classic writer question, "what if"—as in, what if these fae were in today's world? Who would they pursue? And that led to thinking about all the musicians whose lives I was chronicling. It felt like an ideal match, which posed the question: Once you've attracted the attention of magical beings, how do you get rid of them before they kill you?

Are Ciaran, Malachi, Padraig, or any of the other characters in the novel inspired by or based on specific individuals?

They are amalgams of many musicians I've spoken to and traveled with over the years, some more closely than others. If you were in a band in the 1990s—when the book takes place—and you were touring through the East Coast of the US for the first time, there's a chance something you did, said, wrote, or shared inspired me.

How did the novel evolve and change as you wrote and revised it? Are there any characters, scenes, or stories that were lost in the process that you wish had made it to the published version?

The main body of the story hasn't changed all that much from the first draft: Introduce fae, describe rock world, present serious problems, figure out how—and if—we can get the characters out of those problems. But the introduction chapters, where we first meet Ciaran, Ma, and Padraig, shifted as their characters became more defined. Initially, I had Padraig already growing up with the monks, but felt delving into his difficult childhood was more important. There was also a part where one of our fae shape-shifted, leading to a different kind of bittersweet ending, but it just felt silly in later drafts. The most significant addition was including Yeats in the mix. We're looking at young men entrenched in their cultural background—they can speak Irish, but have mixed feelings about it—who are fairly unaware of the folklore of their ancestors, which means it can sneak up on them. Yeats' work compiling folktales has come under some criticism in recent years (a larger topic), and I felt it was important to include both his work as an archivist and the sense that he might have just made up some of what he was writing in that book. This comes out in Sheerie's backstory, toward the end of the novel. Were there any scenes or characters that got lost in the process that I wish had stayed? Not that I can think of! Early drafts of mine tend to have not enough characters in them, and I have to flesh out the world with more peripheral folk.

Your biography says that your "day job" is working as a journalist. How was the transition from writing about things that are real to writing about the fantastic? Was it exhilarating, frustrating, freeing, or something else?

Still working on the full transition, which means I'm still writing entertainment journalism regularly—but the two have been mutually beneficial. My novels thus far have included a lot of backstage, insider knowledge about aspects of the entertainment industry, none of which I would know if I hadn't been covering the field for so many years. And let's be honest: The entertainment industry lends itself to the fantastic and the unreal! I've enjoyed having the two overlap for many years, but now that I have more fiction being published, I'm looking forward to having more time to do that, rather than interviews, reviews, and feature pieces.

Do you have any friends that you've known as long as Ciaran, Malachi, & Padraig have known each other?

Almost as long, yes—I'm still close with a woman I first met in 6th grade, and some of my middle-school friends have been among my earliest readers. The red-haired character (Rebecca) in the book who shows up at the Maryland show to escort the band around? Based on my real-life friend Rebecca, who I've known since 9th grade! Best friends, particularly friends who've known you through so many phases of your life, are precious jewels. They're the ones who keep you on the straight and narrow, and I'm fiercely loyal to each of mine.

You currently live in Brooklyn. Do you have any favorite places? A hidden gem that someone visiting should not miss, but would only learn about from a resident?

Brooklyn has so much to offer, I think more people should skip Manhattan and spend their vacations in our awesome borough! I would point folks toward Industry City, a repurposed set of buildings that (I assume) were either warehouses or sweatshops back in the day. Lots of restaurants, activities, bookstores, chocolate shops, bars, and distilleries—including a fantastic Japan Village and a place called Barrow's Intense Tasting Room, where they make their own ginger liqueur. I'm partial to that one, since I run a reading series at Barrow's, where we provide space for four authors each month and get a very nice crowd of regulars and newcomers.

Have you ever visited Ireland? If so, when and where did you go? Any favorite places there you can share? If not, where would you like to visit when you have the chance?

I've been in Ireland several times over the years. My first time was on a serious budget, when I was in college. I spent the month after my semester abroad (in London) traveling the country, from Dublin to Galway to Kerry, and took a week biking around the Ring of Kerry. I saw Fungi the dolphin in Dingle Bay! I also caught live bands both in pubs and in concert halls (Hothouse Flowers at Dublin's Olympia Theater) and stretched out in lush, green fields out west. I've since gone back for leisure time and on press junkets, and here are a few recommendations:

- The Ring of Kerry—it's more touristy now than when I biked it, but the view is lovely and the weather is some of the best in Ireland
- Dromoland Castle—outside Limerick. Luxe accommodations, but breathtaking. Plus, I was able to work with falcons there!
- Boxty—Irish potato pancakes (but not like the latkes we have in the US) are an obsession of mine. There's a restaurant in Temple Bar in Dublin called Boxty which serves a terrific tasting plate.
- Belfast—Yes, it's the UK, but it's also Ireland, and that's an end to it. Visit Mourne Seafood Bar for a delicious fish meal, then head over to Madden's pub, a short walk away, for music and drinks. We met some lovely folks there who kept our glasses topped up and gave us a wild night we absolutely had not expected.

Is there a real band or group that comes close to the music that Ciaran, Malachi, & Padraig play?

I wanted to keep the actual literal comparisons to a minimum, so people could project their own ideas of what they sound like onto the band. Hopefully, everyone gets a chance to attend a concert that transports you, gets you sweaty, and leaves your ears ringing (for a bit), then replays in your dreams. I've had that several times, and I feel so fortunate, especially since I'm now at an age where I don't like to stand up for hours until the main act comes on at 11 p.m. There was a Celtic rock boom in the 1990s, and bands that came out of that era – inspired by U2—were a mix of traditional, folk and rock—like The Hothouse Flowers, The Waterboys, Energy Orchard and Clannad.

Who are some of your favorite musicians and/or bands? The best concert you've ever attended?

Best concert is easy: Peter Gabriel on his *Big Time* tour (a summer tour supporting So) in the mid-1980s. Some bands stand on the stage and play to you. Some bands perform. Gabriel is a master of the rock spectacle, and he gets so into his songs it's like you've been invited on stage with him. For a long time, he was famous for leaning back into the arms of the front row and being passed around, then back to the stage, which is both extremely brave and wildly foolhardy. Other musicians or bands who've given me a similar feeling include The Beautiful South, Martin Stephenson (with and without the Daintees), Paul Simon/Simon & Garfunkel, The Trash Can Sinatras, and INXS.

Who would you like to see in a live concert that you haven't seen?

I think the moment has passed on this, but I'd sure love to go to a Prefab Sprout concert. Lush melodies, incredibly poignant lyrics, and genius musicians. (A Prefab song is quoted in the book.) I'd also love to see Taylor Swift and probably should have gone to the Eras tour like approximately half of the known universe—she knows how to put on a show and seems like she's having the time of her life. I 100 percent believe that an amazing concert that sweeps the audience up in its arms and leaves you breathless is as close to real magic as we get in this world.

If *The Only Song Worth Singing* were going to be adapted to a film or series, who would your dream cast be?

Finding the right men for the role would be so tough, because we want actors who are of the moment, and in their 20s. Whoever's hot changes approximately every 36 hours, it seems. Ideally, we'd get Irish or Celtic actors for the roles, which narrows the pool. I could see Saoirse Ronan as Caitlin; Eve Hewson as Sheerie; Jack Reynor as Ciaran; Domhnall Gleeson as Mal; and Aidan Turner as Patrick. They're all talented, but I'm choosing them for their looks and heritage as well. Can any of them sing? Hewson can—she's Bono's daughter, after all. The others... hard to say!

What's currently on your nightstand?

Whatever books I'm currently reading, and ones I hope to be reading. I've got Michael McDowell's *The Elementals* about halfway through (his Blackwater collection of novellas blew me away), and I'm enjoying a short story collection by Matthew Kressel, *Histories Within Us*. I have a big fat tome of the collected stories of Sherlock Holmes, but that's slow going; a crossword puzzle collection from *New York Magazine*, some reading glasses, and my phone, plugged in and turned on its side so I can use it as a clock.

Can you name your top five favorite or most influential authors?

Stephen King, Jonathan Carroll, Roald Dahl, Robert Cormier, Judy Blume.

What was your favorite book when you were a child?

The Girl Who Owned a City by O.T. Nelson. I couldn't get enough post-apocalyptic fiction, and still can't.

Was there a book you felt you needed to hide from your parents?

Not exactly—they didn't pay too much attention to what I was reading. I just picked things that looked interesting off their shelf. But if they'd fully realized how some sections of *The Book of Lists* by David Wallechinsky, Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace were, they probably would have taken it from me. Still, I now know what a "zarf" is thanks to that book.

Is there a book you've faked reading?

Many, I'm sure. I may write fantasy, but I really didn't read much of it growing up. I read a lot, from many genres, but there are so many classics in science fiction, fantasy, and horror that I have never tackled, in part because I don't think reading for fun should be an assignment. I do like to point out that I gave *Moby-Dick* a genuine effort, but when we hit an extended chapter discussing nothing but whales, I decided life was too short.

Can you name a book you've bought for the cover?

Covers influence me all the time; it's one reason I'm so particular (as much as an author is allowed to be) about the cover. So, almost every book I purchase is picked up in part because of the cover. The one that first leaps to mind is *A Green and Ancient Light* by [Frederic Durbin](#); the title and the deep forest green of the cover hit a lot of buttons for me before I'd even read the back.

Is there a book that changed your life?

Every book I've read has done that, in one form or the other. But in the context of where my life is now, I'll pick *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* by [W.B. Yeats](#), which was formative to coming up with the idea for *The Only Song Worth Singing*. It also opened the world for me about fairy stories and folk tales in general, as well as being inspirational (and, as I've learned in recent years, controversial).

Can you name a book for which you are an evangelist (and you think everyone should read)?

Constantine's Sword by [James Carroll](#), which is a history of the Catholic Church and the Jews. Carroll was a priest who left the vocation to get married and have children, and interweaves his own experience with a very specific slice of history that most people don't have a good grasp of. His could-have-happened explanation for Christ's "return" after three days is particularly intriguing.

Is there a book you would most want to read again for the first time?

Yes and no. The thing is, books hit us differently whenever we read them. I'd have to also be the person who read that book for the first time if I was reading it for the first time again, and I'm not. So while there are many books I'd love to enjoy with an Eternal Sunshine'd brain, I don't know if they'd resonate the same way with the me I am now.

What is the last piece of art (music, movies, TV, more traditional art forms) that you've experienced or that has impacted you?

I went to see [Derek DelGaudio's](#) *In and of Itself off-Broadway*, four times. [DelGaudio](#) is a magician, but he's also a storyteller, and that show is a master class in discussing identity and connecting with the audience (with incredible illusions, too). You can watch a version of it on Hulu, but it's not the same as being in the theater and feeling the impact. I also attended the last show and got to meet the director: [Frank Oz](#).

What is your idea of THE perfect day (where you could go anywhere/meet with anyone)?

I'd want to meet up with one or more of my friends and go for a long walk or bicycle ride in a grassy space, then stop and get afternoon tea (yes, with clotted cream!) and talk without any restrictions on time or content. My first choice of location is in the UK or Ireland, but New Zealand holds my heart in special ways, so if we can go anywhere, I'd do it there. And wherever we were, after all the walking and snacking and talking, we'd get long massages and soak in a hot tub on a rooftop.

What is the question that you're always hoping you'll be asked, but never have been?

How much can I pay you to adapt your books into TV series and films?

What is your answer?

I'll come up with a nominal sum, but want some input! [Gillian Flynn](#) (*Gone Girl*) has shown us the way in this area.

What are you working on now?

Tune in Tomorrow will get a second book in its universe (as a standalone) called *We Interrupt This Program* in fall 2025—so edits are still coming for that. But what I'm writing is the third book in that universe, *Don't Touch That Dial*—which is expected to come out in 2026. So that's keeping me busy, but so is my husband's imminent retirement: We're going to travel, and that also takes a lot of planning!



The Only Song Worth Singing

Dawn, Randee

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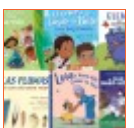


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